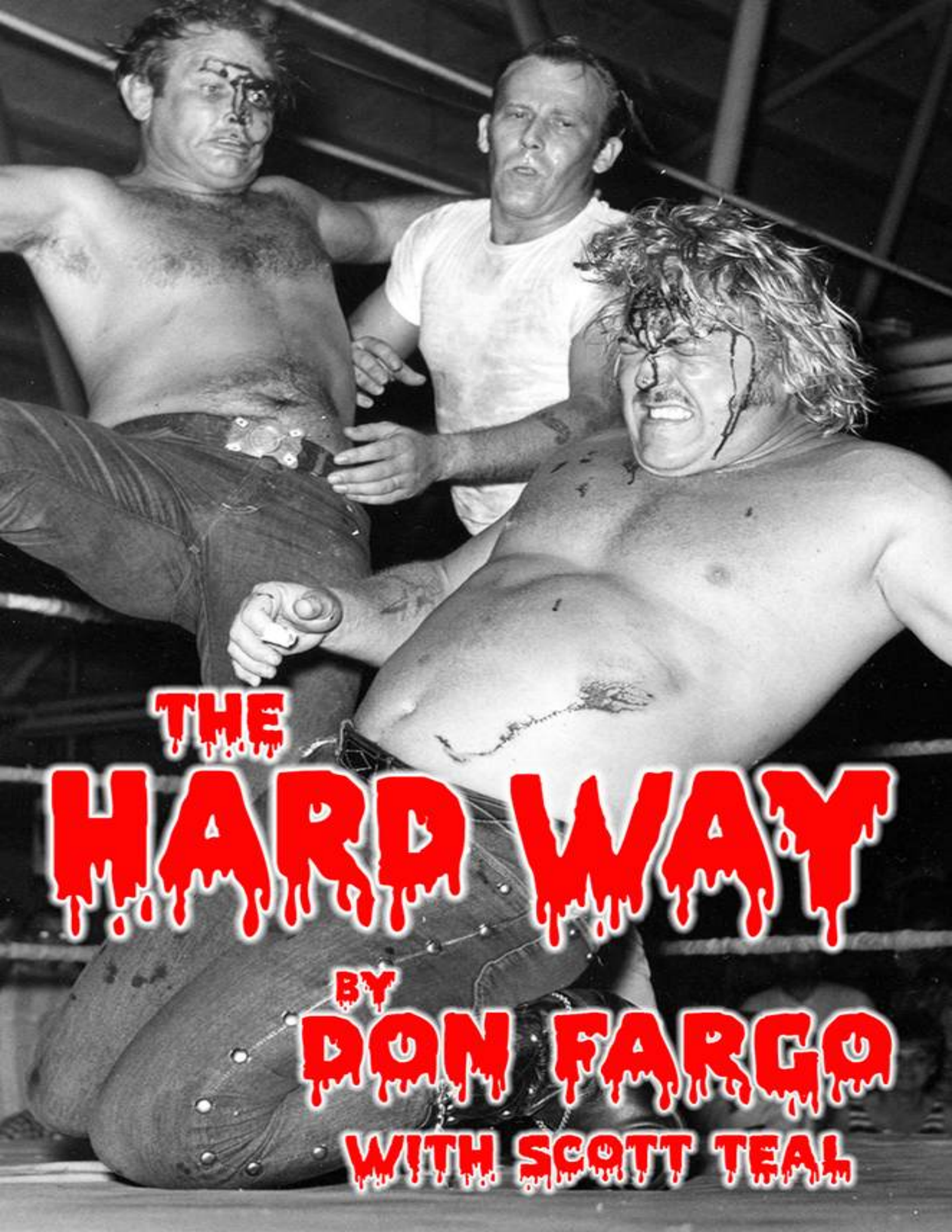
THE
HARD WAY
BY
DON FARGO
WITH SCOTT TEAL

The Hard Way

by Don Fargo, with Scott Teal

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Acknowledgements

Bobby Wilson — I want to thank Bobby Wilson for all he’s done for me as a friend and as a promoter … and for getting me out of jail. We first met in Gulfport when I was working for a promoter named Lou Pericola. I later worked for Bobby when he promoted. He was a good referee and did a little wrestling, as well.

Cowboy Bob Kelly — I had some of my best matches with Bob Kelly. We drew big crowds in the Gulf Coast and our careers have been intertwined for almost 50 years. He helps keep my spirits up and always takes care of me at the Gulf Coast Wrestlers’ Reunion. I was worried that the reunion would fall apart when Lee Fields died, but Kelly has done a super job as president of the organization. You’ll be reading more about Bob in one of Scott Teal’s upcoming books.

Dennis Gale — I’ve known Dennis since the ‘70s. He’s a good friend who never asks for anything from me, but always asks what he can do to make my life a little bit easier. When I was told I would be inducted into the Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame in New York, I didn’t know what I was going to do because I couldn’t afford to go. When Dennis heard about my induction, he bought airplane tickets for not only me, but my friend Crash, as well. A lot of people call themselves "old-school promoters" these days, but I’ve gone to some of their shows and they’re anything but. Dennis is the epitome (I don’t know what that word means, but my editor told me it would be a good one to use) of an old-school promoter. He doesn’t throw 20 matches on a card. He’ll book five or six solid matches with good talent. He runs in decent buildings, does a first-class job of running the shows, pays for good security, and even puts out a program that is top-notch. When he runs shows, he brings me in and makes me a part of them. Those appearances keep me alive because wrestling is all I’ve ever known.

Elliott Wiggins — I’ve known Elliott since he was just a kid. I used to work for his dad, who promoted a few wrestling shows in Pensacola. I went to Elliott’s house one time and painted a mural on his bedroom wall. When I

was 60 years old, I wrestled Elliott on one of Sika Anoa'I's shows. I got a side headlock on him and took him over shooter style. I pushed him way up into the air and dropped him to the mat. It knocked every bit of air out of him. He looked panicked for a few seconds because he couldn't breathe. Elliott is another guy who helps me out a lot. He's nice and polite. He's also a lost soul in the wrestling business because he was born at the wrong time in history. He would have made a great wrestler in the day.

Garry Johnson — I call him Zippy. He's a real character. I tell everybody he's a guy you want to kill at times, but you can't help but love him. Seriously, Zippy is such a good-hearted guy. So good-hearted, in fact, that people often take advantage of him. Zippy has done so many things for me. He built a wood stove for my firewood, a lawn swing, and a barbeque grill. He builds wrestling ring, too. The most important thing he does is to drive me to the Tennessee Wrestling Legends Reunion in Nashville every September. If it weren't for him, I wouldn't be able to go because I don't have a way to get there. He doesn't charge me a penny, either. I'm proud to be his friend.

Shane Tripp — Shane has been a godsend to me. Every time he comes to visit, he does something to help me. When I broke my hip in 2012, he brought a bunch of guys to the house and they all pitched in to clean my house and straighten out our yard. I was in a wheelchair, so they arranged things so I could move through the house easily. He organized a poker run to help raise money for me, and collected money from friends around town. The last few times I've bought a car, he went with me to be sure the dealer didn't screw me around. He even surprised me with a party on my 80th birthday. Shane calls me "dad," which is appropriate because he's like a son to me.

Murray Von Redlich — What can I say about Murray. Zippy introduced me to him. He's fighting a battle with kidney problems, but he'll come all the way down to Pensacola from Montgomery to take me places. When I try to pay him, he refuses to take anything. Murray is another guy who loves the wrestling business. In 2012, Zippy's car broke down in Birmingham on the way home from Tennessee. Garry called Murray, who drove 80 miles to get

me, another 253 miles to take me home to Pensacola, and 171 miles back to his house. That’s the kind of guy he is.

Roy and Lisa Haynes — Thank the Good Lord that he let me meet Roy and Lisa (The Adjuster). I thought nobody loved dogs as much as I do, but they do. That’s why I hardly ever call them by name when I tell people about them. I just call them "the dog people." They send me food and treats for my dogs. They are genuinely decent people.

J Michael Kenyon and Jim Ruehrwein — Two people I’ve never met, but have a great deal of appreciation for, are J Michael Kenyon and Jim Ruehrwein. Together with my editor, they have been researching my career and compiling my ring record, the page count of which currently stands at 180 pages. A great deal of what you will read in this book is the result of information they dug up about me, much of which even I didn’t remember (and some I wish they hadn’t discovered).

Scott Teal — It’s unbelievable how much Scott has done so me. Not only this book, but way back to the day we first met in August 1975. He’s been like my official photographer since then. He’s written many, many books that keep the history of wrestling alive. Above all, Scott and his wife Angela take care of the boys. Their reunion is the best … because they invite us into their home. Angela cooks meals for the boys (and girls) for the entire weekend, and it’s not something out of a can. It’s delicious, homemade, Southern cooking. They even have a ring set up in their back yard. I can’t get in it, but I love to just sit and look at it because it brings back so many memories. Because of Scott and Angela, we have something to look forward to each year. Their reunion is like what Forrest Gump said. It’s "like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re gonna get." They would be surprised to know how many of the wrestlers talk about how much they love and appreciate them.

Margie — You’ll read much more about my wife, Margie, in the pages that follow. Margie always has been a sweet thing. Above all, she stuck by me through all my problems, troubles, and bad habits … something which no other woman has done. Some men think their women married them for their money. Margie chose me when I was dead broke. When we went through hard times when I was drinking and doing drugs, she stuck by my side.

When she sees me carrying something, she takes it and carries it for me. She worries about me and calls whenever I’m going for any length of time. The greatest thing about our relationship is that we love the same things, with animals being our number one interest. I can’t thank her enough for staying beside me and loving me, despite the things that would have driven any other women away. I’m a blessed man.

Foreword by Cowboy Bob Kelly

I worked with a lot of guys over the years, and most of them were really good. When I asked them to do something, they knew how to do it, but they really didn't know why they were doing it.

Fargo, on the other hand, was a ring general. He always understood why I asked him to do something. He understood the wrestling business and he understood what it took to make the business work. He was a ring general. If I asked him to do something, he knew what I wanted, and why we were doing it. If something went wrong during a match, you could always depend on him to straighten it out. If a finish went bad, he would do something else and it would work just as well as what we had originally planned … and nobody in the audience was the wiser.

One thing I can say about Fargo is that he's one of a kind. There's nobody in this country comparable to him. In my opinion, he was the master of the ring. I never ever had a bad match with him and I never had a problem with him. He was one hell of a man. If there ever a man who worked in this business, who deserved to be world champion, it was Fargo. He had all the charisma and talent needed. It was a treat to work with him, too. He thought about the business all the time and he knew what it took to get over. The only other person I can think of that can compare to him was Bobby Shane.

Fargo and I have been friends for many years, and we never had a cross word between us. Over the years, I heard a lot of stories about problems he caused the promoters. I never saw that side of Don. Sure, he walked out a few times and left without giving notice, but he never caused any problem for me or any of the Fields boys. I'm not saying he didn't smoke pot, drink beer, or raise hell in the bars, either, but he did all that after the matches. A lot of the boys did those things. However, they did it after they finished their job, and they always presented themselves as professionals in the ring.

Lee Fields and I heard stories about some of the guys, and the trouble they caused in other territories. I don't remember anyone causing any problems

in the Mobile territory. I think they respected Lee and me enough that they took care of themselves better than they did in other places. If we heard bad stories about one of the boys who wanted to come in, Lee would say, "Well, we'll book them and see what happens. If they cause trouble, we'll give them their notice and ship them out of here." But we didn't have any problems with anybody!

Well, okay. There was Dr. Jerry Graham. He came in and caused a lot of problems, but we ran him off. But he was the only wrestler who caused us any problem at all.

Fargo and I started working the Louisiana territory on the same night in 1965. He and Gene Stevens came into the territory as Jack and Frank Dalton.

As a matter of fact, we started at the same time, on the same night. Morgan City, Louisiana, December 6, 1965. It was their first night in and it was my first night in. That's why I tell everyone our feud stretches from 1965 through 1976.

On that first night, I was a substitute for someone who didn't show up. Bobby Fields and I worked with the Daltons in the main event. After that, I continued to do what I had been hired to do … referee. I refereed a lot of the Dalton's matches and they liked working with me. They did things to inject me into the story, even when I wasn't a part of the program.

Two months after our first night in the Louisiana territory, I was in Bill Golden's trailer when Fargo and Lee came in. I was in the bathroom, so they didn't I was there, but I could hear them talking. Fargo told Lee he thought his program with Bobby Fields was running down because they had been wrestling for a long time. Lee asked him, "Wadda you think we oughta do?"

Fargo said, "Put me with Kelly."

"Kelly?"

"Yeah. Have you ever watched him work?"

Lee said, "Yeah, I've watched him work."

Fargo said, "Put him with me. We'll make some money."

We just went from there. When they decided to do that thing, they were going to do the natural things … I would be the referee for Lee's matches. When he got into trouble, I helped him. After a time, Fargo (as Jack Dalton) got tired of it and beat me up. On the TV program, Lee said he was going to train and get me in shape so I could beat Jack Dalton. I won a few opening matches, I lost a few, until I had a match with Frank Dalton. When I beat Frank, that put me in line for a match with Jack. The rest, as they say, is history.

If it weren't for Fargo, I may have continued to referee, and my career may have followed a completely different path. I have him to thank for me getting over because he's the one who really did it.

The people in the Gulf Coast loved to hate Don Fargo/Jack Dalton, but there were times they loved him just as much. It never lasted long, though. He would leave for awhile and, when he came back, he would do something on his first night in to make them hate him once again.

In October 1971, we worked a deal where Fargo was suspended for manhandling a referee and he came back wearing a mask. We called him Mr. D. On October 20, he won a tournament in Mobile's Municipal Auditorium and won an opportunity to wrestle Dory Funk Jr. for the NWA world heavyweight title.

In the weeks leading up to the title match, Fargo had been engaged in a feud with Ken Lucas, perhaps the top babyface ever to appear in the territory. The people were anxious to see Funk beat Fargo and remove his mask. The two of them wrestled for 50 minutes of the 60-minute match and the people had been pulling for Funk all the way. During the last ten minutes of the match, the people were on their feet. They were cheering and screaming encouragement … but not for Funk. They had changed their tune and were supporting Fargo. The longer the match went, the harder the two fought, and the harder Fargo fought, the more they got on his side. In the last couple of minutes, Funk looked like he was running out of gas, but Fargo

was coming on strong. The people were so disappointed when the bell rang signaling the end of the match. They had hoped to see the belt change hands right there in Mobile … and they wanted it to go to the man who, just a few minutes earlier, they had hated with a passion … Don Fargo.

The next week, Fargo wrestled the Wrestling Pro … and the people turned on him. Three weeks later, on November 17, I unmasked him.

In 1975, I decided to retire from the ring, so we had the fans vote for who they wanted me to wrestle in my final match. Fargo won the vote by an overwhelming number of people, and it was a legitimate vote. Even though they had seen the two of us wrestle countless times, they wanted to see me trounce him just one more time.

On December 16, 1975, we sold out the Expo Hall. At the end of the match, I was setting Fargo up for the bulldog when Bob Sweetan came out to help him. When Fargo got up off the mat and saw Sweetan attacking me, he went after Sweetan and chased him out of the ring. Of course, I was awarded the match by disqualification since Sweetan interfered on Fargo's behalf. Fargo walked over to me and lifted my arm into the air, showing the people that I had won the match. The people went absolutely crazy. Just like that, Fargo was as popular as any babyface we had ever had in the territory. It was quite a finish to our 12-year feud.

Fargo wrestled as a babyface for the next four weeks, at which time he disappeared. Two years later, he returned … as a heel, and the people hated him just as much as they had in the past.

And then there was the night Fargo and Nick Kozak wrestled in a "Hell's Kitchen Street Fight." Kozak ripped off Fargo's coat, shirt and pants. Fargo was wearing nothing but a necktie. He had left his underwear at home.

We've been friends for many years and there's never been a cross word between us. I'm honored to have been asked to write the foreword for his book. I don't know yet what the pages of the book will hold, but if they're anything as exciting as the life he led, you'd better strap yourself in for the ride of your life. Cowboy Bob Kelly June 2014

Chapter 1
Hide the Belt

This may sound crazy, and I know you've never read anything like this before, but before I begin telling you what I do know, I'm going to tell you what I don't know.

I don't know a whole lot about my family background. In fact, I'm not even sure where I was born. My best guess is that I was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania because we did live there when I was a baby, but that's about as much as I can tell you.

My actual age is another unknown. I thought my birth date was October 3, 1927, but my editor found a photo with "July 4, 1927, 9 months old" written on the back, which would mean my birthday was October 3, 1926, a year earlier. He later found another one on which "1927, 1 year and 10 months old" was written on the back. In that case, my birthday could have been no later than February 1926. Based on the ages written on the backs of the photos, those dates conflict with each other, so I'm not sure exactly when I was born.

I can't begin to tell you how old I was when I did this or did that. I remember asking my dad about getting older. He said, "You're never old as long as you live young. Age is nothing but a number." Newspaper and magazine articles written about me when I won the 1952 Mr. Pittsburgh contest say I was 21 years old, while others say I was 18, so they aren't much help.

I don't know much about my parents' background, either, other than the fact they were of German descent, and I don't even know whether it was my parents or grandparents who immigrated to the States.

The most surprising thing you have to know about me, especially since I'm "writing" this book, is that I can't read or write. If I look at a book and see a

word I’ve seen before, then I might know what it says, but when I look at a bunch of words together, I’m totally lost. If I drive down the road and see a sign at a gas station that says Exxon, I know what it says, but if that word is in a book surrounded by a bunch of other words, I can’t separate it from the rest.

Now that I’ve overloaded you with "facts" and "information" I don’t know about my childhood, I’ll tell you what I do remember about my parents and my childhood.

William Kalt, my dad, didn’t have much of an education. When he married my mother, he couldn’t read or write much at all, but she taught him. He became a much better person because of it. He learned enough that he was able to leave unskilled, labor-intensive jobs behind and become an insurance agent. Life was really tough in the ‘20s, but as a result of his diligence, I grew up in what would be considered a "middle-class" family. We still struggled, but not nearly as much as most of the other families in the neighborhood. I had friends who never knew where their next meal was going to come from, but we always had food on the table.

My grandfather’s name was Herman. I didn’t know my grandmother too well because she died young. My grandfather remarried and he and step-grandmother lived in a tiny shack on top of a hill in Pittsburgh. We visited them almost every weekend and I would play on the edge of the cliffs. I looked forward to it because they had a huge boxful of toy soldiers. When my step-grandmother died, my dad moved him [grandfather] to a suburb in the West End of Pittsburgh called Elliott. He lived in an alleyway in a small, one-room apartment. My dad went to see him every Saturday. He was almost 100 years old when he passed away. He was old and grumpy. "Ah, I don’t want nobody helpin’ me. I can do it myself." That attitude is what killed him. While leaving the house one day, he slipped and fell down the steps. His head hit the edge of one of the steps and he died right there on the spot.

My parents moved from Altoona to Pittsburgh when I was still a baby. Believe me when I tell you, it was a pretty rough place, with the neighborhoods divided up into ethnic groups. The Italians lived on one side

of town, the Irish on another, and the Germans were settled four miles west of the city in a borough called Ingram.

My dad worked long hours and my mother stayed at home, like mothers were supposed to do in those days. She cleaned the house and took care of our family.

We would go to Mount Washington, a neighborhood on the south side of Pittsburgh, and ride up the incline on cable cars. There was a place everyone called "The Lookout" where we could look down and see the city of Pittsburgh, the Ohio, Allegheny and Monongahela rivers, the Point Bridge, and all the steel mills. During the daytime, everything looked dirty and sooty, but it was beautiful at night. Everything was lit up and the lights stretched for miles. We'd watch the coal barges float up and down the river.

The young kids joke about me talking about the "old days," but people my age understand what I mean when I talk about how times have changed. When I was a kid, you could leave the front door of your house unlocked, or open, for that matter. You could leave the keys in the ignition of your car.

I hated school. I used to walk to school. It was a long walk. I felt like Little Lord Fauntleroy because my mother dressed me in fancy clothes. I kept dirty clothes hidden outside the house in a burlap sack and would change into them before I got to school. That is, if I made it to school. Many times, I'd meet my friends at the railroad tracks and we'd spend the day getting into mischief. Occasionally, when it rained, my dad would take me to school. I'd walk in the front door and out the back.

My third-grade teacher's name was Miss Crocker. She had a paddle with holes drilled through it, which allowed the air to pass through so it would move faster and hit harder. She'd say, "Donnie Kalt! You come to the front of the room!"

Everybody called me Donnie, and I hated that name. When people asked me why I didn't like it, I'd say, "It's too drug out. Daaaawnie." That's the way they'd say it. When my mother got mad at me, she'd call me Donald. She used to embarrass me so badly. We'd be playing basketball on the corner, two blocks away, and she'd stand on the front porch and yell,

"Donald! Donald!" The kids would all grin and say, "Hey, Donald! Your mommy wants ya."

When I acted out in class, Miss Crocker would call me to the front of the room and say, "Bend over my desk and don’t move!" Wham! Wham! Wham! That would hurt so badly. One time, I put my hands behind me, with my palms facing outward, and covered my rear end. Boy, was that ever a mistake. Wham! Wham! Wham! She got three good whacks on the palms of my hands before the pain reached my brain. I never did that again.

One day, I got upset about something and threw my inkwell at Miss Crocker. She was so mad she decided she’d push my punishment up a notch. She went to the office and got Dr. Steiner, the principal. He grabbed my ear and marched me to his office, where he had a long willow stick. In those days, we wore knickers, which were loose-fitting, short trousers that gathered at the knee. Our socks were supposed to be pulled up and secured underneath the leggings, but I always let mine droop down to my ankles. He picked up his willow stick and let me have it. Today, that would be considered child abuse.

When I got home, I told my dad about what happened. He went down to that school and cussed out Dr. Steiner. My parents didn’t use physical punishment. My dad was a negotiator. He would say, "Sit down and tell me what happened. Let’s see how we can work this out." My mother would scold me, but she never hit me, either. The worst thing they did to me was make me sit in the hallway at the base of the steps. I would have preferred a spanking because I had a hard time sitting still for any length of time.

That didn’t mean my dad let me get away with things. One day, I came home crying when I cut my thumb. Dad was smoking his pipe and reading the newspaper. He put it down and very calmly said, "What did you do now?"

I was sobbing and trying to milk as much sympathy out of him as I could. "I cut my … sob, sob … thumb and … sob, sob."

He said, "And it hurts?"

I said, "Yes," in a small, squeaky voice.

I almost never wore shoes. He said, "I’m so sorry it hurts," and he proceeded to bring the heel of his shoe down onto the top of my bare foot. Oh, man! I can still feel it. I grabbed my foot and started to cry even more. He said, "Your thumb don’t hurt no more, does it?"

My dad used to lecture me when I would cuss. I asked my dad once, "You tell me you don’t want me to cuss. So why do people cuss all the time?"

He said, "That’s a sign of a lack of education. People don’t know words to use, so they use a cuss word, instead."

The "F" word was a real big no-no. In today’s world, it’s a conversation piece. Parents today tell kids not to swear, but how can they convince them of that when they hear it constantly in the movies and on TV. My dad was trying to teach me that, if I didn’t get an education, I wouldn’t have the words I needed, so I’d cuss. He was right, too. That’s exactly what happened.

I didn’t go to school for very long, unless you count the three years I was in the third grade. I eventually moved up, but I think the teachers passed me out of pity. I just wasn’t interested. The only things that interested me were the things I enjoyed doing, like drawing. When my teachers discovered that, they gave me pencils and paper and put me at a desk in the back of the room. They did whatever they could to keep me occupied and out of trouble. And, believe me, I was always in trouble. Old movies show boys grabbing a girl’s pigtail from behind and shoving it down into the inkwell. That wasn’t something from a screenwriter’s imagination. That was something I did … many times.

If I had to go to the bathroom, they’d send a hall monitor with me to be sure I didn’t sneak out of school. They didn’t realize I could climb out the bathroom window, even though it was on the second floor.

One day, the school gave us eye tests and told my mother I had to wear glasses. Oh, god! I was not going to wear glasses. Anybody who wore glasses was a bookworm, which was the term we used in those days since

the word "nerd" hadn’t been invented. My mother took me to the eye doctor and made me get a pair, but before I went to school, I took out the lenses and only wore the rims. Like people wouldn’t notice.

I didn’t smoke cigarettes, but I loved to chew tobacco. When I was about ten years old, I decided to walk around with a cigarette hanging down from the corner of my mouth. I wanted people to think I was a bad ass. I wanted to look tough. One day, an older kid walked up to me and said, "You wanna look bad? That cigarette ain’t doin’ it. Here, chew some of this."

He handed me a plug of Beech-Nut Chewing Tobacco. I’ll never forget how sweet it tasted. Unfortunately (or perhaps on purpose), he didn’t tell me I shouldn’t swallow it. I sucked on that tobacco and swallowed that sweet-tasting juice until … sure enough, I got sick. That didn’t deter me, though. I grew to like it and I kept a plug between my teeth and lip all the time. I’d spit into a sheet of wadded-up paper that I kept in my pocket.

I played a lot of street hockey with the kids in the neighborhood. We didn’t have any money, so we had to improvise. We would play hockey by using flattened tin cans as the puck and pieces of wood as hockey sticks. We would cut the bottom out of a bushel basket, nail it onto a telephone pole, and play basketball under the streetlight.

We played some wild games, too, like what we called "hide the belt." One of us would walk down the street and hide a belt. It wasn’t a regular belt. It was made of heavy leather and had pointed studs down the length of it. Everybody had to look for it. If you found it, you tried to keep it a secret. While everybody else was still looking, you tried to get between everybody else and home base. When you did, you could whip their asses with the belt until they touched the base.

We slept on our front porches a lot at night. When our parents went to sleep, we would sneak away. We’d carouse the neighborhoods and get into whatever mischief we could think up. Around four o’clock in the morning, we’d go to a grocery store like the A&P where the bakery and dairy trucks would be parked. We’d watch the delivery men unload their trucks. When they went inside, we’d run to the trucks and steal cakes, milk, loaves of bread, sweet rolls, cookies, boxes of jelly doughnuts … anything we could

lay our hands on. I’m not proud of it, but we were poor, so we would steal anything that wasn’t nailed down.

I was a member of a street gang called the Deuces. It didn’t last long, though, and it wasn’t what people think of when you mention gangs today. We were just a group of kids who thought we were bad. We had patches with the dice and the deuce sewn onto our jackets and we all had crew cuts. Occasionally, we would get into fights in empty lots and fields with members of other gangs. One of our guys would get into an argument with someone from another gang and they’d challenge each other. "You’re chicken shit if you don’t meet me at the corner of sixth and main at midnight!"

"Oh, yeah? You just be sure your ass is there and we’ll see who the chicken shit is."

The funny thing was, nobody ever showed up alone. Other members of the gangs would always come along as backup. We’d bring pieces of wood and baseball bats to use as weapons, garbage-can lids for protection, and we would beat the hell out of each other until one side gave up. One thing I have to admire about the gangs in those days; we all adhered to a rule that nobody would bring knives and guns to fights.

I don’t remember what grade I was in when I quit school. The school board was concerned about me because they caught me carrying a knife and a gun. My brother gave me the gun, but it was broken and wouldn’t fire. I was a tough kid, but I wasn’t a bully. My problem was that I was a loner. I just didn’t want people around me. Most of the other kids were members of groups, both in school and in the neighborhoods, and they would pick on those who weren’t affiliated with a group. More than once, I flashed my knife or gun so they’d stay the hell away from me, and I never got caught doing it.

I always got the bad end of the stick because I had reddish-blond hair, and bullies liked to pick on redheads. Even when I was in the Marine Corps, when my hair began to grow back after they shaved it off, it was always, "Hey, Red." "Come here, Red." "Do this, Red." Red this, Red that.

The school did their best to find something to keep me busy and out of mischief. At one point, they gave me a job sweeping the hallways and emptying trash cans. They didn’t pay me. They did it to keep me out of trouble.

When I was eleven years old, one of the teachers, who taught at a high school in the Mt. Washington neighborhood, tried to help me. The school had something called the jayvee class, where kids went to learn metal and woodwork. He introduced me to the teacher, Mr. McGregor, a big, old Irish fat guy. I thought I was a bad ass because I was going to "high school." When we walked into the class, I looked around and saw guys with unshaven faces. They were guys who should have been in juvenile, or jail. There weren’t any females; just males, and they were all rough-looking bastards. Like me, they were older guys who couldn’t make it in regular school. Looking back, I feel badly for Mr. McGregor. He tried his best to teach us, but we didn’t want to learn. We’d talk, throw erasers, or lay our heads down on the desk and sleep. Mr. McGregor tried to get our attention by banging a stick on his desk, but when the bell rang, we hadn’t learned a thing.

We weren’t allowed to associate with any of the "normal" school kids, but while I was there, I saw a girl in the hallway. She was so pretty. Her name was Joanne Schwarzmüller. I fell for her. Long story short, we became sweethearts.

I didn’t stay at the school for more than a year, but I’d go see her at her house. Her parents didn’t care for me at first, but I think they grew to like me because they were a German family, too. In fact, a few times during my wrestling career, I thought about using the Schwarzmüller name as a gimmick.

By the time I was 13 years old, I went to work. One of my first jobs was in the coal mines. We didn’t have the technology they do today, so the poorer mining companies still used mules to pull the coal carts through the shafts. The miners would send the carts down, where they would be filled with coal, and we led them out to the mine entrance.

We’d take .22 rifles with us because we could make extra money shooting rats, which were everywhere. The company would pay us a nickel for every rat we shot. Of course, that caused problems between us kids because we’d fight over them. On average, I would make 50 to 75 cents a day, which was a lot of money back then.

For a short time, I had a paper route, which was a pain in the butt because I had to get up early in the morning before the sun came up and roll the newspapers. I pulled them through the neighborhood on a wagon. That didn’t last too long. In those days, people had milk delivered to their house. The milkman would leave bottles of milk and other dairy products on the porch in a small, metal box. When one of the customers caught me taking swigs of milk from one of their bottles, they called the newspaper office and had me fired.

I also worked as a cement carrier. I would mix the mortar in a wheelbarrow, put it in a sling over my shoulder, climb up a ladder, and dump it on a mortar slab. The bricklayer would then use it to lay the bricks. They made really good money, but I was doing all the hard work for menial wages. The difference was, they were skilled craftsmen who knew how to lay the brick.

I know I put my parents through a lot when I was a kid living at home. I got into trouble all the time. Almost every week, the cops would bring me home for one thing or another. The only thing my dad would say was, "Oh, boy. What did he do now?" It became such a frequent occurrence that my dad quit worrying about it. I remember overhearing my mom ask him what they were going to do with me. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "I don’t know what we can do. No matter what we do or say, he’s determined to go his own way. I’m just gonna try not to think or worry about it."

One day, when I was around 15 years old, two of my friends and I were trying to decide what to do. We decided to hitchhike to Montpelier, Vermont, which was about 600 miles from Pittsburgh. We ran into all kinds of trouble on the way. One day, when we were broke and hungry, we walked for an entire day before someone driving a refrigerated truck stopped to pick us up. "I ain’t got no room fer but one of ya in the front," he said, "but if you boys wanna sit back there on that tailgate, yer welcome to."

He didn’t have to ask twice and we didn’t give him time to reconsider. One of my buddies got into the cab and my other friend and I climbed up onto the back of the truck. As the miles flew by, my friend and I began to contemplate over what might be in the refrigeration unit. Our curiosity eventually got the better of us and we opened the little door that led into the box. Looking in, we could see containers of ice cream stacked up from floor to ceiling. Before either of us could say anything, we were both fighting to be the first to get a box. Wriggling our way into the unit, we each pulled out several boxes and began to eat as much and as fast as we could. We didn’t care that we didn’t have anything to eat it with. We used our bare hands to dig into the frozen treat. We were like two wolves tearing into a freshly killed deer.

We were stuffed by the time we quit. It wasn’t until much later, after the guy dropped us off and we were on foot again, that we told our other buddy what we had done. He was so pissed. I didn’t feel sorry for him because he thought he had gotten one over on us when he called dibs on riding in the cab.

The reason I picked Montpelier as our destination was because I had worked there one year as a farmer’s helper. I didn’t stay too long because I got sick of doing nothing but work. The farmer and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. Bolton, worked hard and it was a lonely life. During the time I was with them, I didn’t see anyone else the entire time I was there. Every day, I milked cows, scraped the cow troughs, watered the horses, and shoveled shit. I was a city boy, so I didn’t care too much for that. One time, when I went up to bring in the cows, a bear was standing in the middle of the pasture. I took off running down the hill. "Bear, bear!"

We were eating dinner one night when Mr. Bolton saw a deer walking down the road. He stood up, got his rifle, walked outside, and shot it. The deer took off running towards the woods. Mr. Bolton said, "We’re gonna go get that deer. It’s not quite dead."

I wasn’t all that excited about going into the woods at night, but he insisted I go with him. Now, I had never seen anything like this, so I was pretty shocked by what Mr. Bolton did when we found the deer. He cut its throat and gutted it. "Go back to the farm, get a shovel, and bury the guts," he

said, matter-of-factly. When I finished the task, I had to help carry the meat back to the house.

When we got back to the house, my education continued. They had an outbuilding, something called a cold cellar, on their property. It was a big hole dug into the ground with a shed built over it. Since they didn’t have a refrigerator, it was used to keep food from freezing in the winter and cool in the summer. Meat hung from the rafters and vegetables were piled up in the bottom of the hole.

I left not too long after that. I’m sure they were pissed, but farm life was just too much for a city boy to handle.

Getting back to the story of our trip to Montpelier, I thought enough time had passed that the Boltons would be over any ill will they may have held towards me and would be glad to see me again. I also was hoping they might feed us and let us sleep that night in a warm bed.

We walked the final eight miles to the farmhouse because there was no traffic to be seen in either direction. When I walked onto the property, I saw Mrs. Bolton standing outside the barn. Telling my friends to wait on the roadside, I walked towards the barn for a much-anticipated reunion. "Hi, Mrs. Bolton. It’s me. Don Kalt."

"I don’t know what you want, but I have a helper and he lives here with me now," she said. "Mr. Bolton died shortly after you left."

No sooner had she said that, then the helper walked out of the barn. "You boys get the hell out of here or I’ll cut your guts out." He held a big knife in his hands. I didn’t wait around. I took off running across the yard and told the guys what had taken place. We didn’t leave, but we stayed on the side of the road, watching the house to see if he was going to leave. We didn’t think he could see us from the house, but after an hour or so, he came out and shouted, "Are you still out there?"

I decided to give it one last try. "Yeah. Can we have a few apples from the trees?"

POW! "Get the fuck out of here!"

All three of us knew exactly what that sound had been. He had fired a gun. We didn't know if he had aimed it at us, or if he simply shot into the air. All we knew was, we weren't going to hang around and give him an opportunity to practice his marksmanship.

The next day, we decided it had been a bad idea to leave home, so we began the long trek back to Pittsburgh. We must have hitched rides with 50 different people during our trip … but one, in particular, really scared me.

When a car pulled to the side, my buddies got into the back seat and I sat up front. The driver didn't say much, only asking us if we were going to Pittsburgh. "I'm only going as far as Erie," but I'll be glad to take you that far."

Two hours later, he says, "This is as far as I can take you," and he made a turn down a narrow dirt road.

Oh, shit.

Pulling over onto the side of the road, he said, "Get out of the car. I want to show you guys something."

I couldn't read my buddies' minds, but they were probably thinking the same thing I was. "Oh, my god. This guy is gonna kill us or try to do some weird fuckin' things." We didn't get out of the car.

"Come on! he urged. "I wanna show you somethin'. I ain't gonna hurt you. I just wanna show you somethin'."

All kinds of thoughts were running through my head. "He's got a dead body in the trunk." "He's gonna shoot us dead on the side of the road."

When we walked around the rear of the car, he opened up the trunk lid. Inside was a large duffel bag just packed with money. He said, "I just robbed a big store."

Now I was thinking, "God, now I know I’m gonna get killed. You don’t leave witnesses."

He said, "If you guys are hangin’ around here later, I’ll pick you up and take you on into Pittsburgh."

We all expressed the same thought. "Why would he wanna come back and pick us up?" Needless to say, we didn’t hang around. We walked to the nearest town to tell somebody about it, but we didn’t know what to tell, so we didn’t say anything. We did go into a gas station that had food and supplies. Strangely enough, nobody was in the store. We hollered, "Anybody here?" Anybody here?" several times, but nobody answered. The three of us looked around, looked at each other, and began stuffing our pockets with candy, cigars, cigarettes, and anything else we could carry. We took off and never looked back.

Other than that scare, the constant hunger we suffered was the worst part of the trip. Towns weren’t as close together as they are today, and when you found one, most of them had only one small store. We were lucky to get rides, too. The Interstates had yet to be invented, so everybody drove on two-lane highways where it wasn’t easy to stop because there wasn’t much of a shoulder in most places. And when we did get rides, the people who picked us up were usually either drunk or rednecks.

It must have been two or three weeks before we finally got home. As I walked up the sidewalk that led to my house, my dad was sitting in his chair and reading the newspaper on the front porch, as he always did at that time of day. When I walked up, all he did was look at me and say, "About time you got home. Your mother was worried about you."

That was it. My mother walked out and grabbed me up in a bear hug. "Where have you been, Don! I’ve been sick and worried to death. I’ve been just worried to death."

I looked over at my dad and he was reading the newspaper, as if he didn’t have a care or concern in the world. I can’t say I blame him. That was just one of the times I left home without telling my parents where I was going.

I think I inherited good genes because my dad lived until he was in his late eighties. My sister did, too, although my brother died when he was in his early sixties, but he drank a lot. He drank the hard stuff, didn't eat well, used a lot of salt and sugar, and smoked cigarettes and a pipe. I remember when he came down to visit us one Sunday. There was no alcohol sold on Sunday at that time, so he brought a brand new bottle of Scotch with him. He was so excited about getting it into the house that he tripped on the rug and it slipped out of his hand, shattering on the concrete. I'll never forget the look on his face. It was funny at the time. Of course, it wasn't quite so funny when, decades later, I made a commitment to quit drinking and had my last beer. I knew then what he must have felt like.

In the early '40s, I enlisted into the Marines. At the time, you had to be 17 years old to enlist, so I wasn't old enough, but I bluffed my way in. There were a lot of guys under age when I enlisted. They lined us all up and said, "If you're under age seventeen, step forward or forever hold your peace." Several guys stepped out. My foot twitched a bit and I came close to doing it, but I wanted to go. When nobody else stepped out, the recruiter swore us in and said, "Well, now you're in the Marines, no matter what age you are."

I don't like to talk about my time in the service, so I'm going to skip over that part of my life. When I got out of the Marines, a few things happened that really made me think about the dangerous things I was doing with my life.

From 1946 until 1951, I worked regular jobs around Pittsburgh. In 1950, Joanne Schwarzmüller and I got married. We almost got married when we were 16 years old. We had plans to run away to Steubenville, Ohio, to get married, but it didn't work out. Our parents told us it would never last, but we stayed married for 24 years, which was a lot longer than anyone expected.

Chapter 2
Oink, Oink!

In late 1949, I got interested in bodybuilding and weightlifting. One day, a young guy with a nice body showed up on the street corner where I was selling newspapers. He wasn’t as big as the guys today, but he looked really good, even in street clothes. I asked what he did and he said he worked out at the YMCA. His name was Jack Channing.

Jack is credited for winning first place in what was considered to be the very first "Mr. America" contest. A man named Johnny Hordines was one of the first physique-contest promoters and was credited in the January 1948 issue of the Chicago Bodybuilder magazine as the "originator of the Mr. America Contest." His "Finest Physique Contest" was held on December 1, 1938 at Gardner’s Reducing Salon and Gymnasium in Schenectady, New York. Jack Channing placed first in the five-foot to five-foot-eight class.

Jack was short, but he had big arms and a huge back. When I told him I wanted to be a power lifter, he invited me to join him at the Y, which, coincidentally enough, was right across the street from where I sold newspapers every day.

In those days, they didn’t have gyms on every street corner. If you wanted to work out, you worked out at the YMCA. That was just about the only place you could go to work out. I was working, so I saved enough money each week to pay a quarter to get in and a dime for a towel. I know it must sound funny to hear me say I had to work to save 35 cents, but that was a lot of money back then.

On my first day there, Jack put 130 pounds on a bar and made me military press it ten times. When I put it down, he said, "Okay, add ten pounds and do ten more reps." When I finished, he said, "Make it a hundred and fifty."

Each time, he would add ten pounds. Finally, I said, "I can’t do any more."

"What do you mean you can’t do any more? I want more … more!"

I didn’t want to disappoint him, so I went way beyond the limit of what I would have been able to do on my own. I pushed and I pushed and I pushed … until 225 was like nothing to me. When I finished, I’d just drop the weights. KA-BOOM! The weights would bounce three feet back into the air off the wooden platform. You can’t do that in the modern gyms today. I loved doing that, though. The harder they hit, the louder the noise, and everybody would look.

I loved working out so much that it became my life. Mom always made my lunch. I didn’t know anything about nutrition or proper diet. My only concern was to bulk up, so I ate a lot of peanut butter and bananas. On his way to work, my dad would drop me off at the Y about nine o’clock. I would go upstairs to the weight room and work out until eleven, take a break, eat lunch, rest for a half hour, and go right back again. I’d work out until it was time to go home for supper.

When I weighed 190 pounds, I did a 300-pound military press, which was a lot in those days. There was a guy named David something who beat me by five pounds in a contest. He did 305. My best was my bench press. Today, the monster weightlifters do 700 and 800-pound bench presses, but a 300-pound bench press in my day, which I did, was fantastic. I once did twelve reps on the bench with 100-pound dumbbells. I would squat with 370 to 400 pounds, but anything less than 800 to 900 pounds is nothing in today’s world. My favorite routine, however, was to work with dumbbells. They weren’t the beautiful chrome weights they use today. Our dumbbells were round and made out of solid steel.

About 18 months after Jack Channing took me under his wing, I entered the 1951 Mr. Pittsburgh contest. I worked hard and trained religiously, but even though I thought I was ready, I couldn’t believe my ears when they announced my name for second place. Jack told me I should be proud because it was my first bodybuilding contest.

The Mr. Pittsburgh contest was my first time to experience what went on backstage at a bodybuilding contest. Guys were pumping up and spraying baby oil all over their bodies. Everybody seemed to have their own little secrets. Most of us used an eyebrow pencil to shade in our stomach muscles. When we stepped onto the stage under the lights, it made us look more cut and defined than we actually were. Today, bodybuilders airbrush each other.

In the early ‘50s, bodybuilders wore tights in competition. I don’t know what they call the tights they wear today, but they’re skimpy and show a lot more of the thigh. When Jack Channing competed, they wore swimming tights. Jack, though, was ahead of his time. One night, he entered a contest and walked out on stage wearing a jockstrap. They disqualified him instantly and pulled him off the stage. He thought a jockstrap would do a better job of showing off his body … which it did!

A few days after the contest, a buddy and I decided to take a trip to York, Pennsylvania because we wanted to meet all the legends we had read about in the magazines. We wore t-shirts with "York Barbell Club" printed on the front.

I expected to see a really nice gym, with neatly stacked weights and beautiful equipment. When I stepped through the door, I was shocked to see a regular "iron house." Weights were scattered everywhere, all over the floor. You had to watch every step you took or you would trip over something. Several of the benches were made out of wood, and the fabric on most of them was torn.

It’s funny, but one of the things I really loved about the Y was the weights. I loved them. The exercise machines so popular today are great for older people, but for young guys, the heavy weights are so much better. When I was working out at the Y, we had to make our own lat [latissimus dorsi] machines so we could do pull-downs behind our necks. We made one with cables. It kept swinging, so we had someone stand behind us to hold it steady. That’s what we call "old school."

The only thing I cared about when I walked into the gym at York, though, was the opportunity to possibly rub shoulders with guys like Jules Bacon,

Malcolm Brenner, and especially John Grimek, one of the world's greatest bodybuilders and weightlifters of the 1930s and 1940s. Not only were those guys legends, but they were true stars. They didn't use steroids. They used nothing more than old-fashioned sweat and hard work to build their bodies. I heard one of the guys there refer to Malcolm Brenner as "Peanut Butter." When I asked why they called him that, they said his mother always traveled with him and fed him peanut butter. He had a beautiful body, but it was kind of marked up and scarred.

Malcolm had huge pecs [pectoralis muscles]. That's what I wanted, so I asked him what he did to get them. He said he did dips with 100-pound dumbbells. I went home and started out with 25-pound dumbbells, working at it until I thought I would be able to handle the 100-pound dumbbells. Jack rigged up a harness with a chain and hook on the end and strapped it around my waist. He then put a 100-pound dumbbell onto the hook. Jack started by making me do three sets of ten repetitions and I gradually increased the weight until I could do ten sets of ten reps. My pecs swelled up like balloons.

Years later, when I was wrestling in New York, I worked out at the boys' club. A young boy walked up to me and asked, "What did you do to get such a big chest and arms?"

I told him, "I did a lot of dips and bench presses."

Five or six years later, Jackie Fargo [Henry Faggart] and I walked into the lobby of the wrestling office in New York City. There was a big Italian guy sitting in one of the chairs. I didn't notice him sitting there until he shouted out, "Kalt! How are you doing?"

I hadn't heard that name in years because I had been wrestling as both Don Stevens and Don Fargo. "Hey, Kalt! Remember me?"

I looked over and saw this huge monster filling up the chair in front of Vince's desk. He really looked impressive. "No. Who are you?"

He said, "It's me … Bruno! Don't you remember? At the boys' club a few years ago. You told me to do bench presses and dips."

It was Bruno Sammartino. He was huge. Then it hit me. I thought, "Good god! Did he come here to take my place or something?" That was the first thought that ran through my mind. Wrestling was a cutthroat business. If you didn’t watch your back, you could be on your way out. But what a massive guy he was. He told me he did what I told him to do … lots of dips and bench presses.

I also was introduced to mat wrestling at the Y. A short, bald-headed guy, who was an amateur wrestler, went there to work out. He always wanted to wrestle somebody. One day, he approached me and asked, "You wanna go up to the room and wrestle a little bit, Kalt?"

I told him the truth. "I don’t know nothin’ about it."

He said, "I’ll teach ya."

It wasn’t until it was too late that I realized the only thing he wanted to "teach" me was a lesson … a lesson on how little I knew about wrestling. I thought he was giving me a huge advantage because he got down on his hands and knees and said, "Okay, turn me over."

I remember thinking to myself, "This is gonna be a piece of cake!"

When I was in position, he said, "Okay, go."

I couldn’t move him. He dropped down to his stomach and I couldn’t get the leverage I needed to turn him over. I pushed, and then I pulled, and then I pushed again. Perspiration was pouring off me until the mat underneath my knees was as slippery as snot. He just laid there and let me struggle until he heard me gasping and trying to catch my breath. The next thing I knew, I was on my back and he was on top of me.

When he let me up, the only thing I could think of to say was, "How did you do that?"

I never was a very good amateur wrestler, but over the next few weeks, he taught me enough to protect myself. He even showed me some of the hooks

[moves meant to cripple or injure]. He didn’t try to injure me, but he’d hook me and put on enough pressure to make me squeal like a pig.

Oink, oink.

Chapter 3
Kay Fabit

We didn’t have a TV for a long time because my dad thought it was evil; a tool of the devil. If he only knew how bad television programming would become. It was so cool when we finally got our first TV, although trying to watch it wasn’t as simple as it is today. We didn’t sit down, turn it on, and watch it. We had to turn it on, and then sit down. There were no remotes in those days, so if we wanted to change the channel or turn up the volume, we had to get up and turn knobs on the front of the TV set. I was always the stooge who had to get up and change the channel. Many times, as soon as I sat down, the picture would begin to roll from top to bottom. I’d have to get back up and adjust a knob called the vertical hold. At other times, the picture would be snowy. In that case, we had to turn the antenna (which we called "rabbit ears" in those days) or move it around until we found a strong signal. The picture was black and white. Color televisions wouldn’t become common in homes until the late ‘60s.

The first time I saw wrestling, it was on television, before I got into bodybuilding. I was amazed and captivated by it. I thought it was the greatest thing ever … two guys beating the hell out of each other. That appealed to me because I was getting into fights every day when I was a kid.

It wasn’t until I took second place in the Mr. Pittsburgh contest, though, that I ever considered getting into professional wrestling as a career, and I never went to a live wrestling card before I began training to be a wrestler. In fact, I didn’t even know there was wrestling in Pittsburgh.

A week or so after the Mr. Pittsburgh contest, I got a phone call from someone who had seen my picture in the newspaper. He said he wanted to take me to Hollywood. "I can get you in [motion] pictures." I didn’t know what to do, so I didn’t do anything. I didn’t call back. He didn’t call me back, either, and I forgot about it.

Alex Bentley, who promoted professional wrestling in Pittsburgh, called and said he wanted to meet with me. The only thing he told me was that he was a wrestling promoter. That got my attention. At the time, I was still working with my brother, grinding lenses for rifle sights. I called in sick the next day and met with Bentley in the lobby of the YMCA. Bentley promoted wrestling in The Gardens, the building where they held roller derby and boxing. The first words out of Bentley's mouth were, "How would you like to be a professional wrestler?"

I decided I wasn't going to make it easy for him. I was going to play hard to get. "Yeah! What do I gotta do?"

He said, "You'll have to sign a contract with me. You won't start out making much. How much do you make a week now?"

"I make thirty-two dollars a week."

He said, "I'll give you a contract for fifty dollars a week. You'll have to go to Columbus, Ohio, to train." I didn't have a car, so I asked him how I would get there. He said, "You'll have to take the bus. You'll meet with a man named Al Haft and you'll have fifty dollars waiting for you at his office."

I didn't know who Al Haft was, but I would soon learn that he was the wrestling promoter in Columbus. Alex gave me the address of Al's office and sent me on my way.

At the end of March 1951, I got off the bus in downtown Columbus and wandered around for about 30 minutes, hoping I'd stumble across the building that housed the wrestling office. I finally flagged down a cab and asked the driver, "Do you know where Al Haft's …"

Before I could say another word, he interrupted and said, "I know where it is. Do you want me to take you there?"

"Yeah."

When I walked into Al Haft’s office, which was on the second floor, the first thing I saw was a big blackboard with names chalked on it. Frankie Talaber, who was Al Haft’s booker, was sitting there. I introduced myself. He said, "So you’re the bodybuilder. Take your shirt off. I want to see what Alex is talking about."

His attitude towards me was really condescending. I took off my shirt and struck a few poses. His smirk changed into a smile and he said, "You’d make a good babyface here."

I didn’t know what he was talking about. I thought he was saying I was pretty. I wanted to ask, "What the hell’s a babyface?" but I kept my mouth shut. Later that day, I called home and told my dad, "He called me babyface." Eventually, when I was accepted into the wrestling business, I learned that "babyface" was wrestling terminology for the "good guy."

Talaber asked me, "Do you know anything about wrestling?"

I said, "I’m a bodybuilder, but I wrestle at the Y."

"Do you think you’re good?"

I said, "Yeah."

He said, "The gym is on the third floor. We have a ring there and enough weights to tickle your fancy. Go upstairs and wait for me. I have somebody I want you to meet."

I said, "Okay."

"Do you have any tights or shoes with you?"

"Nope."

"Then just wear your pants, I guess."

I went upstairs and couldn’t believe it when I saw the ring. After looking around to be sure I was alone, I climbed into the ring and jumped up and down a few times. I ran to one side of the ring and bounced off the ropes

like I had seen them do on TV. All of a sudden, in walks this guy who I assumed to be about 60 years old. He was bald, he walked humped over, and he had thick cauliflower ears. His name was Speedy LaRance [Jules LaRance]. He got into the ring without saying a word. No introduction, no greeting, nothing. A second later, Al Haft, Frankie Talaber, and a few other guys walked in. I didn't know it at the time, but they wanted to see me get hurt. They knew what was going to happen. I, on the other hand, didn't have a clue.

It was then that Speedy finally spoke. "Let's go."

I looked over at Talaber and asked, "You want me to wrestle him?"

He said, "Yeah."

Tentatively, I said, "Okay," and looking at Speedy, I said, "Let's go."

He got down on his hands and knees and I said, "Oh, no." I remembered the other guy. "No, I ain't gonna …"

He said, "Well, you said you could wrestle."

I said, "Sure, as long as this is catch-as-catch-can. That's what it is, ain't it?"

He said, "Yeah. Just get down."

I wasn't on my hands and knees more than two seconds before that son-of-a-bitch had my face on the mat. I hit that mat hard, face-first. He hooked my arm, tied me up tight, and I screamed bloody murder. He had me bent like a bow. I would rather have been the arrow. It wasn't like the YMCA, either. It was much, much worse. Oh, man! He was killing me and I couldn't move a muscle. The guys on the outside of the ring were giggling and laughing. When LaRance finally turned me loose, they went back downstairs, laughing the whole time. They didn't stop when they got to the bottom, either. I could hear them laughing in the office.

I laid up there for a while after Speedy left, looking and stared up at the ceiling. When I finally came to my senses, I rolled to my knees and shook my head. I got up and walked down the stairs to the first floor. Talaber said, "Hey, Kalt! Where are you going?"

"Home, I guess."

"What? Don’t quit. Do you think you can come back tomorrow?"

I hesitated for a second before saying, "Yeah."

"Where are you gonna stay? Are you stayin’ across the street at the Southern Hotel?"

I said, "Yeah."

He said, "Well, you come back here tomorrow and we’ll see what you can do against somebody else."

I told him I would, but I really wasn’t sure. I left the office feeling ashamed of myself. I also was pissed off because everyone laughed at me. I walked across the street to the hotel and locked myself in my room for the rest of the day and night.

When I woke up the next morning, I told myself I wasn’t going to let them get the best of me. I walked across the street and marched into the office, full of confidence that I would be able to better handle myself the second time around.

This time, they put me in the ring with a wrestler named Ruffy Silverstein [Ralph Silverstein]. I’m glad I didn’t know his background because I might have turned around and gone home had I known. Ruffy, who stood five-foot-eight and weighed 225 pounds, had wrestled in the amateurs for the University of Illinois. In his final three years of competition, he didn’t lose a single match. In the Big Ten wrestling championships, he was the 1935 champion at 175 pounds and the 1936 champion in the heavyweight division. He won the 1936 NCAA championship at 175 pounds and was an All American in 1935 at 175 pounds. To top it off, he was a member of the

1936 U.S. Olympic team [along with some other Jewish athletes, Silverstein boycotted that year’s Olympics since the Games were being held in Nazi Germany].

I could give a lengthy, blow-by-blow description of my time in the ring with Silverstein, but I’d rather just sum it up in a few words.

He hurt me.

There was one upside to that second match. Nobody laughed, although I could see smirks on several of their faces, as if they knew things would go exactly as they had. As I left the building, I thought to myself, "What the hell are they doin’ to me?" I couldn’t figure it out. Both times, they had tortured me for not much more than a couple of minutes (with me screaming during a good portion of that time) and sent me on my way, and both times, they encouraged me to return the following day. I had no idea why they bothered. The way I saw it, nothing about the second day had been any different from the first, and I was under no illusions that things would be any different on the third.

The next morning, I walked into the office and, with all the bravado I could muster, said, "I’m ready to work out again, Mr. Haft."

Al Haft looked up from his desk and just smiled, which put me off somewhat. From the other side of the room, Frankie Talaber piped up, "There’s somebody upstairs waitin’ on ya, Kalt. He’s up there workin’ out with somebody."

I could hear them. BOOM! BOOM! I went up to see who I would be "working out" with and saw Stu Hart. Stu wrestled in the amateurs in 1929 at the YMCA in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. He won an AAU gold medal in 1937 in the welterweight class, and in 1940, he won the Dominion amateur wrestling championship in the light heavyweight category.

When I walked into the room, he was shooting [wrestling for real] in the ring with a young wrestler. I said, "Who am I supposed to work out with here?"

"Uhh, aa-aach … you’re lookin’ for me."

I got in the ring and, just like the two guys before him, he gave no quarter and showed no mercy. I later heard one of the wrestlers refer to Stu as "the man who loves to give pain." Stu gave me a triple dose of it that day and kept me in the ring for a good five minutes.

A few weeks later, Stu became the wrestling promoter in western Canada, the territory everyone refers to as "Calgary." Many years later, during the short time I was wrestling for him, I went to his house to visit him. Stu was foolish enough to ask me to join him for a workout in his dungeon. I said, "You know, Stu. I have a pretty good memory. There’s no way I’m gonna go down there."

Once again, just as they had after each workout — and I use the term "workout" very, very loosely — Al Haft said, "We’ll see you tomorrow." I really think Mr. Haft thought I wouldn’t come back after that one. When I left the building to return to my hotel room, I could barely walk. There wasn’t a muscle in my body that Stu hadn’t stretched to the limit … and past.

Later that week, I was told the purpose of the workouts wasn’t to hurt me. Al Haft wanted to see how I handled the pressure (and the pain). He sincerely wanted to use me because I had a good body, but he wanted to see what I was made of. On the other hand, I really think Silverstein, Stu, and LaRance may have wanted to run me off because they didn’t want somebody like me around. They were old-school wrestlers with big, thick, brawny "wrestling" bodies. I’m not saying they weren’t in great cardiovascular shape, because they were, but, like most wrestlers of that era, they didn’t have muscular bodies. In fact, the first wrestler I met who had what might be considered to be a muscular physique was Buddy Rogers.

The wrestlers called guys like me muscle-heads. When we told them we lifted weights, they’d say, "You’ll be muscle-bound. When you get old, you won’t be able to lift your arms above your head." I’ve got news for them. Now that I’m old, I can’t lift my arms above my head, but it doesn’t have anything to do with being muscle-bound. That came from a lifetime of

getting beaten up, hooked, and twisted by sadistic bastards like the four guys I worked out with that week. Of those four, Stu Hart was the most sadistic. He really was mean to me. I later realized he was doing it because, like most everyone in wrestling at that time, he didn't want someone in his business that didn't deserve to be there, or who wasn't tough enough to do what it took to be a wrestler.

I'll tell you something else. You haven't lived until you stay in a hotel like the Southern Hotel. I paid $2.50 a night. That doesn't sound like much, but back then, you could buy a hamburger for a nickel. The only furniture in the room was a sink and a bed. There was one toilet on that floor and it was at the end of the hallway. There was no television or radio. Fortunately, they had one of those vibrator beds that give you a 60-second massage for a quarter.

I hate to admit it, but every day, especially during the walk across the street (which I thought of as the "walk of shame") to my hotel, I told myself, "Oh, I gotta go home." The problem was, I didn't have enough money to buy a bus ticket to Pittsburgh, and I didn't have the energy or desire to walk or hitchhike the 185 miles back home. My only option was to stick it out and hope things would get better. If nothing else, I was going to hang in there until I got my $50. The one thing that really bothered me, though, was the thought that the guys I had "worked out" with had each been paid more than $50 to hurt me.

I really wanted to learn, but for a new guy, there were a lot of rules to remember. For instance, I had to learn wrestling's code of ethics, which meant we had to be careful what we said and did around people who weren't associated with professional wrestling. One day, we were walking down the street with some girls. George Macricostas [The Golden Greek] was walking towards me. I greeted him with a loud, "George!"

"Kayfabe!" he muttered. "Kayfabe" was the word we used to let other wrestlers know they needed to be careful about what they said because an outsider was within hearing range. At the time, I didn't know what the word meant, so I kept on. "George! They told me I'm workin' with you tomorrow night."

He turned to the two girls and told them, "Wait here a minute." He grabbed me by the arm, walked me around the corner of the building, and slammed me against the wall. "You dumb son-of-a-bitch." He proceeded to chew me out for talking to him in public. We were going to be wrestling each other and it didn't look good to be seen socializing with our opponents. He also told me to never use the word "work" in public again. I had just gotten into the business, so I didn't know any better. I hadn't been told anything about what I should or shouldn't say in front of the public.

I got called into the office for that incident. When I left the office, I still didn't know what "kayfabe" meant. I thought it was some girl's name. A few days after that, one of the boys called and said, "Hey, Kalt! I've got a girl for you."

"Who? Where? When?"

"Her name's Kay Fabit."

"Kay Fabit?"

"Yeah. She wants us to drop you off at her place tomorrow night after the matches."

The next night, they dropped me off at Kay Fabit's house and she greeted me at the front door before I could ring the doorbell. She was a good-looking girl and we got right down to business. I had just dropped my pants down to my ankles when the door flew open and a masked guy with a shotgun came charging into the room. "What the hell's goin' on here?" he yelled. "Fuckin' around with my wife, huh? I knew somethin' was goin' on behind my back."

I didn't know what was going on, but I knew enough to get out of there. I ran outside through the kitchen door and lit off across the back yard. What I didn't realize was that a clothesline was stretched from one side of the yard to the other. It caught me under the chin and my feet shot out in front of me as my body flew into the air. I landed flat on my back and every bit of air was knocked out of me. As I rolled to my knees, I heard laughter coming

from the direction of the house. Somebody said, "Boy, that was the perfect clothesline."

As I walked home, I came to the realization that I had been set up by the boys. I later learned that "Kay Fabit" was one of the girl wrestlers, and I'm pretty sure the "enraged husband" was Big Bill Miller. They pulled that rib on every new guy. That rib eventually came to be called "The Mabel."

One day, Al Haft called me into his office and explained wrestling's code. The boys — the word we used for wrestlers — kept me in limbo for a long time. They didn't speak too openly around me. They finally came to the realization that they had better "smarten me up" before I did something that would expose the business to outsiders.

After training, I wrestled for Al Haft for about a month. I didn't wrestle on the Columbus house shows [shows in the arenas, as opposed to the TV tapings], but I was booked on several small spot shows [shows run infrequently, rather than on a regular basis) and television in Ohio.

As you've probably already guessed, I was a young punk who didn't always do what I was expected to do. I got too big for my britches and decided it wouldn't hurt for me to miss a show or two, so I just didn't show up a couple of times. Al Haft called me into his office and said, "I think you need to go home for a while and think about how badly you want to be a part of this business."

I was on a bus bound for Pittsburgh the very next morning.

For the rest of that year, I worked a series of jobs. One of the easiest jobs I ever had was working in a delicatessen on the first floor of an apartment house. When one of the tenants ordered something, I had to load their order onto a cart, wheel it down the hallway, up the elevator, and to their apartment.

The delivery dock was located at a level below the first floor, so trucks would back down a long concrete ramp to make deliveries. I had to put the boxes of food and meat on the elevator and take it up to the store. Well, one day, I got the bright idea to load up the cart, wheel it out the door, and push

it up the hill. I pushed, and I pushed, and I pushed. The whole time I was doing it, I was thinking, "Boy, my calves are getting really big." I was such a dumbass.

When I was able to sneak away from the deli, I would go downstairs and hide. I stacked up a whole bunch of boxes in a square formation, leaving a small cavity on the inside. I would climb up onto and over the boxes, sit down in the center, and read my muscle magazines. When nobody was looking, I'd sneak out and grab huge handfuls of ham, bread and cheese from the cooler. I'd hurry back to my hideout and stuff myself full.

In early 1952, Jack Channing pulled me aside and said, "Look, Kalt. It's time you got ready for the Mr. Pittsburgh contest. I know you can win it this time. You need to get off the heavy weights for awhile. You have to start trimming down. You need to start lifting light weights and doing a lot of reps so we can get you cut up."

When I was working on the heavy weights, I weighed around 215. Jack wanted me to trim down to 190. He worked me every day. He made me sweat so much. They didn't have air conditioning back then. All they had in the Y was a box fan in the corner of the room. When you go to a gym today, you'd better wear a snowsuit because they have the air conditioning running full blast and fans circulating arctic air throughout the building. How can you sweat? That makes no sense to me. We went to a gym to sweat, but people today go to the gym and work out in the cold.

I owe Jack so much. He was the one who taught me how to pose and got me ready to compete in the Mr. Pittsburgh contest. He'd take me to contests and point out guys with nice upper bodies, but no legs. There would be bodybuilders with huge backs, but no arms. They just weren't proportioned. When I did see guys who were proportioned, I was amazed, and made it my mission to have every part of my body in proper proportion to the others.

While I was training for the Mr. Pittsburgh contest, my brother got me a job with a company that made telescopic rifle sights. I would grind the lenses to their specifications. It sounds technical, but it didn't take a lot of knowledge or skill. I also worked hard labor for a steel company. I was always trying to impress people. They had ingots of iron shaped like a railroad tie. We were

supposed to put them on a cart and wheel them over to the lift. Oh, no. Not me. I had to show off. I put one on my shoulder and climbed up the steps. I just had to do it. I thought everybody was saying things like, "Man, that's one strong, tough guy." Looking back on it, though, I realize they were probably saying, "What a dumbass! Why would he go to all that trouble when he can just load them on a cart and have them wheeled and lifted to where they need to go?"

In the final days leading up to the 1952 Mr. Pittsburgh contest, my calves were around 18½ inches, and my thighs were massive and cut up. Everything was in proportion. I was at my best when I won Mr. Pittsburgh, weighing in at 190 pounds, which had been Jack's goal for me all along. I stood five-foot-seven, had a 48-inch chest, and 17-inch arms, which was really big back then. Now the winners of the big contests, like the IFBB Mr. Olympia, have arms in excess of 22 inches.

I really looked good and felt confident that I had done what it took to win the contest. With the Mr. Pittsburgh contest less than a week away, I decided to work on my tan. The Y had a sundeck on the roof and sunlamps inside the building. Having listened to other people talk about the sunlamps, I knew it was a quicker way to tan, so I opted for that method. I had never used them before, but how hard could it be to figure it out? I laid down on the table, turned on the ultra-violet light, and began to doze.

There were, however, three key things I didn't know about sunlamps. I didn't know you had to wear glasses, I didn't know I had to put a towel over my private parts, and I didn't know anything about using oil. I just laid down. The next thing I knew, I could smell a terrible odor that couldn't have been anything other than burning flesh. I stood up and looked at myself in a mirror. My skin was as red as a fire truck. Things went from bad to worse as, the next morning, I couldn't open my eyelids. They had swollen up during the night. For a time, I considered going to the hospital, but I didn't. My momma rubbed Noxzema all over me. That's probably why I have skin cancer today. I told the doctor, "I laid in the sun when I was young, and burnt myself in a sun room. Why am I having this now?"

He said, "It's like anything. If you smoked cigarettes when you were young, it catches up to you. You're not the only one coming in here. You're just

lucky you’re coming in with the ones that can be removed."

I did have one bad cancer spot. I had a black beard, so I didn’t notice it. One day, I shaved my sideburns and noticed a black spot, about the size of a silver dollar, on my cheek. At first I thought it was from the chewing tobacco, but he said it wasn’t. He said removing it would leave a big scar, but he did a great job. It didn’t leave much of a scar at all.

People who know me now probably won’t believe me when I tell them I didn’t have any confidence in myself when I was younger. After I finished my posing routine, I went directly upstairs to the dressing room to change. I didn’t think I had won, primarily because of my tattoos, which I thought had hurt my chances, even though I only had two tattoos at the time. I was just getting ready to walk into the shower when one of the judges ran in and said, "Get your ass downstairs, Kalt! You just won the contest."

They didn’t have weight classes back then. They had "best" categories — best back, best arms, and so on — and an overall winner, which was me. I couldn’t believe it.

There was one guy in the Mr. Pittsburgh contest who showed up out of nowhere. They called him the "dark horse" because nobody knew who he was. He had a nice build and he was well-proportioned. It freaked me out because I thought he was going to win, but he wound up in second place.

A few days after the contest, I did my first live interview on the air at a local radio station. My mother went down to the radio station with me. I don’t remember why, but Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis were there. At that time, they were in the midst of a two-year run of The Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis Show. I didn’t know who they were. I just thought they were two guys being interviewed.

In March 1952, a few weeks after winning the contest, Alex Bentley told me Al Haft was willing to give me a second chance. I was so excited. This time, Joanne went with me. I couldn’t live without her and wanted her with me.

This time around, I didn’t get to wrestle on the cards. Al Haft told me I was there to train and learn all I could about the wrestling business. If he saw me making progress, and noticed a change in my attitude, he would book me.

On my first day back in Columbus, I wrestled Joe Scarpello in the office training ring. Like Ruffy Silverstein, Joe had a great background in amateur wrestling. As a three-time state champion at Omaha Central High School, Joe was never taken down during a match, and while still a senior, he won the national AAU championships in New Orleans. At the University of Iowa, he was a four-time Big Ten Conference champion and an alternate in the 1948 Olympics.

The difference between Scarpello and Silverstein was simple. Joe was a nice guy. Like the three others before him, he hurt me, but he didn’t do it with the sole intention of hurting me. He took the time to show me what he was doing, how he was doing it, and what it was that caused the pain. The other guys didn’t show me anything. Joe also showed me how to use holds to hurt someone else. During the workout, I cracked a rib and fractured two bones in my fingers. I didn’t take a body slam, an arm drag, or anything. All I took was punishment.

We worked out for an hour or so. I was ready to tell him I was out of gas when he called an end to it. It had been much better than my three previous workouts. After a minute or so with the other guys, I had been huffing, puffing, and crawling out of the ring. I only worked out with Joe that one time. I later was told that he was supposed to hurt me, not teach me, but he took the time to show me a few things, and for that, I’ll always be grateful.

Frankie Talaber told me to relax that first weekend. When I showed up on Monday, he said, "Kalt, we’ve got a guy upstairs who wants to work out with you. He’ll probably rough you up a little, but you probably learned enough last week to be able to take care of yourself. He’s up there waitin’ for ya."

I guess the look on my face told him I wasn’t too keen on undergoing a repeat of the previous week’s activity. "Who is it this time?" I asked.

Talaber laughed. "You'll see. Just go on upstairs."

When I reached the top of the steps and walked into the gym, I saw Big Bill Miller standing in the center of the ring with his arms crossed. He didn't move a muscle when I walked in. He just glared at me. I stopped in my tracks and just shook my head. The only thought that went through my head, and repeated itself over and over, was, "Oh, no." I didn't know any of the wrestlers I had met to that point, but I knew who Big Bill Miller was. Bill made his pro debut in Columbus the second week I was there during my first go-around, and I had heard all about him from the guys there.

Bill competed in football, wrestling, and track at Ohio State University. He was an All-American heavyweight wrestler, a two-time Big Ten heavyweight champion, and was conference MVP in his senior year. He had the reputation in pro wrestling circles as being a tough, take-no-prisoners, son-of-a-gun.

When I stopped, Bill unfolded his arms and extended his right arm out in front of him, with his palm facing upwards. With his three outside fingers pointed backwards towards his body, and with a sly grin on his face, he slowly curled and uncurled his forefinger, as if to say, "Come here, Kalt."

As it turned out, they were ribbing me. After I stood there for a few seconds, unable to will my feet to move, I heard laughter. Looking around, I noticed someone standing on the far side of the ring. Leaping Larry Chene. It was then that Big Bill Miller smiled and I knew things were going to be okay. I knew it wouldn't be easy, but I had the feeling that I had been accepted.

Larry Chene took over my training that day. What a fantastic wrestler he was. Larry could do anything in the ring. In fact, he was before his time. When I saw him do things like dive over the top rope and hit the floor on his back, I couldn't believe it. Most of all, he took the time to train me without hurting me.

I didn't know who most of the wrestlers in Columbus were when I got there, but the territory was loaded with talent. Rocco Columbo, who grew up in the Bronx, was there. He had a decent career as a mid-carder, but died

in a hotel room on March 6, 1964 as a result of what was believed to be a drug overdose. Jack "The Neck" Vansky, who had the thickest neck of anyone I ever met. Lord Blears [James Blears], who would later go on to promote wrestling in Hawaii, and Roy Shire [Roy Shropshire], who would build a great wrestling territory in San Francisco. Tommy O'Toole, who later ran a bar I frequented quite often in Nashville called the Flamingo. Wrestlers came in and out of Columbus all the time. Karl Von Schober [Lou Sjoberg], Don Arnold, Johnny Valentine [John Wisniski], Frank Hurley, and Frank Marconi were just a few of the other names who appeared on cards while I was there.

I had a lot of respect for a guy named Luther Lindsay, a black wrestler who had made his professional debut right there in Columbus on September 13, 1951. He had a fabulous body, but at the same time, he was a tough shooter [legitimate wrestler]. Nobody could believe it, though, when Al Haft sent him upstairs to wrestle Joe Scarpello and Scarpello beat him.

I remember the first time I saw someone use a move they called the dropkick. The new boys all went upstairs and someone showed us how to do it. Of course, all the boys began to use it. The old saying, "There's no honor among thieves," holds true for wrestlers. The boys all stole ideas and gimmicks from each other. However, Buddy Rogers [Herman Rohde, Jr.], one of the most famous wrestlers in those days, gave me some good advice. He said, "Don't steal anything from anybody who isn't a success. You'll just be setting yourself up for failure." He also said that if I did steal an idea from somebody, color it up, or make it different, so I could call it my own.

Years later, I tried to copy Bobo Brazil's finishing move, the "ko-ko butt." I didn't know how to do it, but I thought it looked simple enough. One night, I grabbed my opponent on both sides of his head and slammed my forehead into his. I saw stars. "Dammit, man!" That was the end of that coco-butt shit.

Al Haft had a small arena called Haft's Acre. It was a half acre of land surrounded by a high fence with tin advertising on the sides. The wrestlers didn't have far to walk to the ring from the tent where they dressed. Mr. Haft had sawdust on the ground and they had to really wipe their feet before they got into the ring. The ring was small, but the guys liked it. When

Buddy Rogers was on the card, the people were packed in there, shoulder to shoulder. I remember matches he had there with Don Eagle [Carl Donald Bell] and Ruffy Silverstein.

Billy Darnell, one of Rogers' entourage, was another great wrestler there at the time. Billy came to the ring barefooted, wearing a leopard-skin leotard and with a bow [as in "bow and arrow"] over his shoulder. He looked like he had just stepped out of a Tarzan movie. Buddy Rogers and Billy Darnell were masters of their craft. I watched and studied their every move. They never talked to each other in the ring. In fact, I never saw them communicate in any manner. They just went into the ring and did what they were there to do. I learned to do that by watching them and taught others to do the same. I always told the guys I trained, "Don't talk. Learn everybody's moves so you know what they're gonna do before they do it." Years later, when I wrestled Cowboy Bob Kelly [Robert Kelley] or the Fields brothers, we didn't have to talk in the ring. We didn't have to say anything. I'd hand them my arm and they'd know what to do with it.

I wanted to be accepted so badly. When I walked out the front entrance of the Southern Hotel, several of the wrestlers would be standing on the sidewalk across the street. I'd walk across the street and I'd try to mingle with them. They'd ignore me, or they'd say things like, "Wait'll you see who they got for ya today, Kalt." One day, someone said, "You're gonna have fun today! Ruffy Silverstein is in town and he's lookin' for ya." They were just kidding around, but it really scared me.

While I was training, I paid for my room at the Southern Hotel. As promised, I was paid my $50 guarantee when I arrived in Columbus and every week after that. After a few weeks, I had a stupid idea and went to see Al Haft. I said, "I need more than fifty dollars, Mr. Haft. I can't make ends meet."

In the back of my mind, I had been worried that he might get upset with me for asking. I was so relieved when a big smile crossed his face. "Well, I think you should go home and go back to your old job. Maybe you can make ends meet there."

What? That wasn’t quite what I had been expecting. Panicking, I quickly backpedaled and said, "Uh, well … I’ll hang out and see how things go."

Unfortunately, Mr. Haft had made up his mind. Joanne and I were on the bus the next day. Once again, I was going home to Pittsburgh.

Fortunately, Alex Bentley was willing to use me. On July 4, 1952, he booked me in the small town of Indiana, Pennsylvania, about 50 miles east of Pittsburgh. I wrestled Bobby Ford, who had played football, basketball, baseball, and track at Youngstown State University. We wrestled 23 minutes and four seconds before he pinned me.

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Indiana [PA] Evening Gazette, June 20, 1952
Kalt reportedly won the "Mr. Pittsburgh" title in "a tournament conducted by the greater Pittsburgh YMCA to determine the most perfect physical specimen in the area." Chaperoning the troupe will be Wayne Griffin, the cherubic announcer, who gives you the ins and outs of wrestling from his ‘foxhole.’

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It was an ordinary opening match, which meant we didn’t do much more than wrestle a clean, scientific match involving a lot of holds and counter holds, and we both wrestled babyface. In those days, promoters generally opened a card with a babyface match. Whenever you wrestled in an opening match, you would be told, "No fists, no blood, no fighting outside the ring. Just get out there and wrestle! Give me a good thirty-minute match." The wild, high-flying, risky moves were reserved for the main event.

Wrestling for almost 24 minutes is a real undertaking. Between the stress, emotions, and physical nature of a match, it doesn’t take long before you find yourself out of breath, or as we called it, "sucking wind" or "blowing up." It took me a long time to figure out how to keep from blowing up. One way is to apply a hold, or have your opponent apply a hold, and work that hold until you regain your breath. Another way is to have your opponent throw you out of the ring. We couldn’t do that when we were in the opening

matches, but I learned that when I began wrestling in the semi-finals and main events. When my opponent threw me out of the ring, I would take the 20-count, which also was good because the fans booed me for stalling and avoiding my opponent, who was goading me to get back into the ring. Buddy Rogers did that, but he took it to another level. Not only would he leave the ring, but he would act cocky and strut around the ring. That made the fans even madder. He didn't necessarily do it to regain his breath. He did it because he wanted to control the emotions of the people, which was something he did very well.

I'll never forget the first night I wrestled in Pittsburgh. My father and mother were so proud. My mother made me a purple, satin jacket with "Mr. Pittsburgh" spelled out on the back in shiny sequins. We wrestled in a boxing ring. It was one of the big rings with four ropes, all tied together, and a mat that had no give whatsoever. I'll never forget watching Buddy Rogers rebound off those ropes. I couldn't figure out how he could do it. Bobby Ford was my tag team partner and we wrestled Jack Vansky and George Macricostas in the semi-final match. Larry Chene wrestled in the main event against Joe Scarpello and Frank Hurley squared off against Tony Sinatra [Cherry Vallina] in the opener. I remember standing in the ring, looking around, and being amazed by the number of people in that packed arena.

In those days, we wore wool tights, which smelled terrible when they got wet from perspiration, and when we washed them, they took forever to dry. I never saw Buddy Rogers wear wool tights. He wore nice swimming tights. There again, it was another example of how he was ahead of his time.

Some of the guys wore shoes that only came up to their ankles. The guys who wore them were the shooters. They wouldn't change their style, or their manner of dress, for anything. They were proud to wear wool tights. When they finished wrestling, they wouldn't wash them. They'd just throw them into their suitcase and leave them there until they put them on the following night.

Those old bastards never shaved, either. They'd get a headlock on you and their underarm hair would hang in your eyes. As a bodybuilder, I shaved my

whole body, so I thought underarm hair was pretty disgusting, especially when it would fall into my face, or worse, my mouth. It didn't bother me after awhile, but it took me a long time to get used to it.

When we were in the ring with an old-timer, they would tell us young boys, "Get a headlock and I'll sell it for you," which meant I would stand beside him, throw my arm around his head, and bring his face down against my side. Sure enough, they would make us look good by screwing up their face and making it look like we were hurting them. What the people didn't realize was, they were killing us. They would have a two-day growth of beard stubble on their chins, which they rubbed and ground into the soft flesh above our waists … on purpose. By the time the match was over and I got back to the dressing room, the whole side of my body looked like it had been rubbed with sandpaper.

They did all kinds of things to us. They'd put a hold on us and put on the pressure, just to let us know they were in charge. Stu Hart was the king of punishment. The boys used to tell me that whenever they saw his name on their booking sheet, they wanted to pack up and leave because they knew he was going to put them through some kind of hell.

The worst thing the old-timers did was something called an "Indian rub." I don't know why they called it that, but that really hurt. When we were wrestling, they would pick out a specific spot on our body — say the back of our hand or our finger — which they would rub and rub and rub, until they raised a blister and the skin came off. Speedy LaRance was the first person to do that to me. I didn't know what the hell he was doing until it began to hurt. I thought to myself, "This guy ain't working. He's up to some shit that I don't think I'm going to like." They did that a lot.

For the first year of my career, I worked in Ohio and Pennsylvania, wrestling people like Frank Hurley, Joe Wolfe, Paul Orth, Jack Vansky, Bob Geigel, and Wild Bill Zimovich. I even wrestled in a couple of tag team matches with Angelo Poffo, who would later have a son named Randy "Macho Man" Savage, as my partner.

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Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: February 7, 1953
[Downtown YMCA] … Don Kalt, winner of the title "Mr. Pittsburgh" for 1952, is to appear and hand out the awards for the 1953 contest. Besides the posing contest, a wrestling and bodybuilding exhibition is scheduled.

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One night in Pittsburgh, I met Donn Lewin for the first time. Donn would later begin wrestling as a tag team with his real brother, Mark. They had a great gimmick. They wore motorcycle jackets and tilted caps like those worn by Johnny Strabler, the Marlon Brando character in the 1953 movie, The Wild One. They looked cool and the women loved them.

Alex Bentley would call to give me my bookings and my dad would take me to the towns. Before that, I don't think I gave anything to my dad other than misery, but I think my dad enjoyed it. He never applauded people, but I could tell by the way he looked that he was proud of me. If my dad was busy, I would catch a ride with one of the other wrestlers. I couldn't afford a car, and even if I could, I didn't know how to drive a standard transmission. I had to pay transportation, which we called "trans," of two cents per mile. That really added up, especially when I was only making $50 a week.

That $50 weekly salary was all I made for quite awhile, but that was big money, especially to a guy who was used to making $25 or less a week. The way things were set up, everybody didn't get paid the same. The opening match got a certain amount of money, the second match got a little bit more, and the semi-final got even more. The wrestlers in the main event were paid the most. I remember sitting in the dressing room and listen to the guys as they opened their pay envelopes. "I got five hundred bucks." I'd open my pay envelope and look at my check … $50. It remained that way for more than a year, at which time I left home to wrestle for Cowboy [Clarence] Luttrall in Florida.

Chapter 4
Swimming with Esther Williams

Even though many of the wrestlers didn’t accept me early on, primarily due to me being a bodybuilder, the fact that Buddy Rogers accepted me was something that really made me feel good. He really took an interest in me and taught me so much. As far as I’m concerned, he was the best performer in that ring there ever was.

I’ll never forget the first time I laid eyes on Buddy. Several of us were hanging around outside the office in Columbus. A taxi cab pulled up to the curb and a man wearing a suit stepped out. He looked immaculate. He wore a hat fashioned from many different colors of fabric and his blond hair flowed out from underneath. Just before he shut the door of the cab, he turned around and spoke to the driver, "You wait here, pally. I’ll just be a little bit." Nobody said anything as he strutted past us. He walked up the stairs to the office and didn’t come back for at least 90 minutes.

I don’t know what he was doing up there. Nobody did. It didn’t really matter to me. All I could think about was how much the cab fare was going to be. When he did come downstairs, he walked to the cab and asked the driver, "What do I owe you?" I can’t remember what the cabbie said, but Buddy pulled out a thick wad of bills from his pocket, peeled off what I thought was a $20 bill, handed it to the cabbie, and said, "Keep the change. I changed my mind. I’m gonna stay here a little longer." He went back upstairs and we were gone before he came back out.

That really impressed me because, if it was a $20 bill, that was quite a tip. At the time, taxi fare was 25 cents for the first mile, five cents for each additional mile, and five cents for every 90 seconds the cabbie waited. I don’t know how much the fare was for his ride to the office, but for just the time the cabbie waited, the charge would have been no more than three dollars, and that was a lot of money in those days.

Rogers was showing everybody that he was "the man," and when I say "everybody," I don't mean just the general public. I mean the wrestlers, as well. He knew we would be there. He knew exactly what he was doing. He wanted us to understand what a big deal he was.

The second time I saw Buddy, he impressed me again. While I was sitting in the office talking to Al Haft and Frankie Talaber, I heard someone shuffling up the steps. I knew it was Buddy because he shuffled, even when he was walking up stairs. When he walked through the door, he stopped and stood, as if he was a god looking over his domain. When he looked at the blackboard, his eyes narrowed. Haft and Talaber had a whole week's worth of bookings chalked on the board; who was working with who, who was off that week. Buddy was very careful about whom he worked with, and even though I can't remember whose name it was, I'm pretty sure he was booked to wrestle one of the shooters. He walked over to the board, erased the name opposite his, and wrote in "The Great Scott." Mr. Haft simply nodded his head and said, "Okay." That was a good example of the power Buddy had.

The first time I ever talked to Buddy was in October 1952 when we both appeared on a wrestling card in Altoona, Pennsylvania. I really got to know him, though, when I became friends with Ray Stevens. I'll talk more about Ray later, but he was in Columbus as the Great Scott's manager and was tight with Buddy.

One day, when I needed a ride to a town, Ray told me I was welcome to ride with them. Buddy was going to drive. That's another example of how Buddy treated others. He was a superstar and could have expected someone like me to drive him back and forth to the towns, but he drove while we relaxed. Even so, I remember being scared because I had heard stories about how Buddy always left late and drove 100 miles an hour. That afternoon, Ray was in the front seat and I was in the back. A thunderstorm started before we left and we could barely see the road, but Buddy never backed off the accelerator pedal. When we got to the arena, he walked in through the front entrance, not the back. He always did it that way. He wanted to be noticed and booed.

I rode with Buddy quite often after that. He liked me because, in his words, "Any friend of Ray's is a friend of mine."

The Great Scott [Johnny "Dutch" Schweigert] was one of Buddy's closest friends. The first time I saw him, he and Ray Stevens were in Columbus. They came to the ring wearing kilts! I couldn't believe it. You have never seen anything as funny as Ray Stevens, with those bowed legs he had, wearing a kilt.

I don't know too much about the Great Scott, though. He wasn't somebody I became friends with. In my eyes, like Buddy Rogers, he was a star. He was above me. I looked up to him and I admired his work. The only thing I know about him after he quit wrestling is hearsay. I heard he left the business just like most of us … penniless. I heard he lived alone and wouldn't answer his door.

Buddy was smart. He surrounded himself with people like Ray Stevens, Billy Darnell, Larry Chene [Arthur Lawrence Beauchene], and a few others, and took them under his wing. He would talk to promoters and get us booked in other territories, where we would be built up and featured. I thought that was great … until Buddy came into the territory and beat me, sending me back down on the bottom of the card.

I got to know him quite well. Ray and I would go to his house and hang around with him. Years later, whenever I was in another territory, if I heard he was coming in, I would get excited about seeing him again.

One time in Nashville, I was staying at the old Maxwell House Hotel, which housed the wrestling office. I had a front room with a big window overlooking Church Street. When I looked out the window, I saw Buddy standing on the corner across the street. I hollered down at him, "Hey, Bud-ro! It's Fargo!"

He looked up and said, "Hey, pally!"

I went running down to meet him. That's how much he meant to me. I never got that out of my system, even when I was working on top and he would come in to work on the card, or if he was on top and I came in on his card.

He just amazed me. I would greet him and shake his hand. The other boys must have thought I was a mark. I still would have carried his bag for him. That’s how much I admired him.

But even though there were a few of us who really loved Buddy, a lot of people hated him. He had a way, though, of winning over people who didn’t like him. I knew guys who would say things like, "I’d like to beat the living hell out of him. When he comes into this dressing room, I’m gonna knock his ass clean across the room."

Later that night, Buddy would walk into the room, slide his suitcase across the floor, and say, "Hey, guys. How’s everyone doin’?" He’d walk right up to the guy who wanted to kill him and hold out his hand. The guy would stand there like an idiot, hold out his hand, and shake Buddy’s. That was charisma. People can talk about Hulk Hogan and Ric Flair all they want, but nobody — and I mean nobody — had the charisma that Buddy Rogers had.

You could tell he was a star by the way he walked, and by the way he carried himself. That strut wasn’t a put-on. He walked like that in his house, outdoors, everywhere. He strutted, he shuffled, he strutted, he shuffled. I copied his manner of walk and the way he talked out of the corner of his mouth. I still talk like that today, but I don’t walk like that now. In part, that’s due to my age, but I do occasionally. There were times when I even strutted around the house. My wife would get onto me. She’d say, "You’re not in the ring, Fargo."

I’d say, "What are you talkin’ about?"

She’d say, "Look at the way you’re walkin’."

One time, Buddy told me, "I’ve been watching you. You need to spend some time in front of a mirror and practice your expressions. You have no expression, Kalt." When I asked him what he meant, he said, "I’ll show you," and he hit me on my arm as hard as he could. I said, "Oww-wwww!"

He said, "That’s expression."

I suddenly realized what he meant. There were a lot of wrestlers who had no expression. We called them pan faces. You could twist their arms around backwards and their faces wouldn't show the pain. Other guys were so good that they could convey agony and suffering in any situation, but I couldn't. I had to feel the pain. I realized there was only one way to learn it. I wanted my opponents to legitimately punish me. That's when I began to tell them something in the ring that I told wrestlers throughout my career: "Come on! Is that all the harder you can hit?" I wanted to feel the pain. I wanted it to hurt.

Buddy taught me several other things that stuck with me throughout my career.

"Believe what you are … and do it well."

I didn't understand what he meant at the time, but I would come to understand that he was talking about the character we portrayed in the ring. That was probably the most important thing he ever told me as I would go on to wrestle as many different characters.

He didn't stop there. I couldn't count the number of times he told me, "Be what you are and live it."

In other words, don't just "act" like the character when you're in the ring. "Be" the character at all times, both in and out of the ring.

I also remember Rogers telling me, "If you can make the people stand up, and then make them sit down, anytime you want, you're in control and you'll be very successful. Not too many guys have the ability to do that."

When he said that, I thought, "I can do that."

Buddy taught me something about showmanship, too. He said, "If you wrestle in the semi-final match, pack your bag before you go to the ring and take a quick shower afterwards. Just before the main event begins, walk through the crowd and out the front entrance." He said, "You'll get all the boos and the guys in the ring won't get shit." He also gave me advice about what to do if I was wrestling in the main event. "If you're on last, take your

time showering and wait until everybody is gone before you leave." That's what he did, and that's exactly what I did, as well.

There was one other thing that impressed me about Buddy Rogers. He never talked badly about anybody. He didn't have to. He could be moody, though. His attitude could change with the snap of your fingers. There were times when I walked into the room when he was berating someone. When he saw me, the look on his face would brighten. "Hey, pally! How are you doing?" His attitude would shift immediately. I was lucky because he was always in a good mood when I was around.

Working with Buddy Rogers was like swimming with Esther Williams. Everything just flowed so smoothly. He knew every move you were going to make before you made it. He knew what you were thinking. His timing was just beautiful.

If for no other reason, I admired Buddy because he always reached out to help the people he liked. If he liked you, he'd do whatever he could to help you.

There were a lot of other talented guys in the Columbus territory, as well, like Bill Miller, Joe Scarpello, and Ruffy Silverstein. Their gimmick was wrestling. I preferred to study guys like Buddy Rogers, Billy Darnell, and the Great Scott. They could wrestle, but they had something the others didn't. They had charisma. Their draw at the box office was based on their characters, rather than pure wrestling.

Before this time, "wrestling" was the main draw, but the business was changing. When the television industry began to take off, and wrestling became one of the main programs on the air, it changed everything. Suddenly, characters like Gorgeous George [George Wagner], Chief Don Eagle, the Sheik of Araby [Ed Farhat], and Dick the Bruiser [William Frederick Afflis] were household names. The blonds came in … Buddy Rogers, the Great Scott, Johnny Valentine, and Professor Roy Shire. People across the street at the stores and bars were always watching the front entrance of the building to see which wrestlers would show up. When Professor Roy Shire came to the wrestling office one day, I watched him park his car and get out. I was amazed to see him dressed in his graduation

robe and cap. Masked men "from parts unknown" were featured on a regular basis.

All of a sudden, I realized what Buddy Rogers meant when he talked about living your character. Before the mid-‘50s, most of the guys went to the ring wearing nothing more than black trunks, black wrestling boots, and with a towel wrapped around their necks. I didn’t want to be like that. I wanted to be different. I wanted to be flamboyant. I wanted to be like … Buddy Rogers.

If I were to describe Buddy Rogers in just a few words, I would say … he was Buddy Rogers. There has never been another like him.

Chapter 5
The Miracle Worker

If it weren’t for Buddy Rogers, I might never have left Pittsburgh. In June 1953, Buddy sent me on the road to my first territory. He just walked up one day and asked, "Kalt, are you ready to hit the road?"

I didn’t know what he was talking about. I didn’t realize wrestling extended outside the borders of Pennsylvania and Ohio. "Hit the road to where?"

"How would you like to go to Florida?"

"Oh, god, yeah!"

I didn’t know anything about Florida. I didn’t know there was wrestling in Florida. In fact, I’m not even sure I could have found Florida on the map. All I knew was that I was going to be given an opportunity to wrestle somewhere else.

"You’ll be wrestling in Tampa for a man named Cowboy Luttrall," he said. "I’m gonna send you down there and they’re gonna take care of you."

I didn’t know what Buddy meant by that last statement, but I was game for anything.

When the bus dropped off me and two others in Tampa, I went directly to the hotel where the wrestling office was housed. The first person I met in the office was Herbie Freeman, who was booking Tampa for C.P. "Cowboy" Luttrall, the promoter. Herbie, who wore thick glasses, also refereed for Luttrall. He sat there smoking a cigar and said, "Just a minute," and went into the rear of the office. When he came back out, he said, "You can go in. He wants to talk to you."

Luttrall, an ex-wrestler well known for having an exhibition match in 1940 against former world heavyweight boxing champion Jack Dempsey, was a

salty old codger. I mean, he was older than old school. He didn’t like the new gimmicks that were creeping into wrestling, but he failed to remember that he had a gimmick when he was still active in the ring. He would wear adhesive tape on his hand and elbow so people would holler, "Hey, ref! He’s got something underneath that tape." It was a gimmick and it had nothing to do with wrestling.

When I walked into his office, Luttrall was sitting at his desk, wearing the cowboy hat he never took off. He was mean-looking. I thought to myself, "What did I get myself into?" But he put me at ease. "Buddy says you’re good." Every time he said something, he referred to Buddy.

Cowboy and Herbie both liked Buddy Rogers, so they put me on their cards and really took care of me. I had my first match in Florida on June 22, 1953. Surprisingly enough, the very first person they booked me with in Tampa was Jackie Fargo, the man who would become my "brother" four years later in Madison Square Garden.

In the years ahead, I would have several wrestling brothers. They weren’t my brothers by blood, but as far as I’m concerned, they were my real brothers at the time, and they still are. Every one of them was and is like a brother to me.

Jackie and I had some good matches. That was the first time I was given an opportunity to do more than just wrestle in openers. Luttrall let us pull out all the stops, so I tried moves I had never been allowed to do before. Again, we were both babyface wrestlers, so we wrestled clean, scientific matches, but we could do some of the flashier moves that, up to that point, had been relegated to the guys on the upper part of the cards.

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St. Petersburg [FL] Times, July 19, 1953
Nick Carter rushed to the aid of [Jackie] Fargo as [Bobby] Lane was "mauling" him. The upshot is that Lane and Carter will meet the following week in one grudge match, while Fargo tackles [Don] Kalt in another. "Fargo is protesting that Kalt showed marked favoritism, that he got a rotten

deal, etc." Kalt, by being first man out of the battle royal, was assigned umpiring duties.

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While I was in Florida, I was booked to wrestle an old-timer named Milo Steinborn in Daytona Beach, a town promoted by a Jew named Saul Weingeroff. Saul's full-time job was making signs in the back of the building where he held the wrestling matches. On the night I wrestled Milo, Saul came into the dressing room to give me my instructions. Before he could do more than tell me who I was wrestling, I opened up my big mouth and said, "You want me to go ten minutes with that old man?"

That was the wrong thing to say. I should have known better. I took terrible beatings from the "old men" in Columbus, and I knew what they could do to me. For some reason, though, on that night, the words came out of my mouth before my brain had time to think about what I was going to say. Right away, Saul walked out and went to the other dressing room to tell Milo what I had said.

Needless to say, the match didn't last long, and I didn't have any problem selling for Milo that night. He put me in holds I had never heard of … holds I couldn't have duplicated afterwards. I didn't know what the hell to do. I wanted to run out. I wanted to puke. The problem was, he had me tied up so tightly, I couldn't do a thing. I couldn't stand up. I couldn't do anything! He was supposed to pin me, but the pain got bad that I yelled "I quit!" at the top of my lungs. The referee didn't have any choice other than to award the match to Milo. He didn't say a word to me afterwards. He simply left me lying in the ring.

The next time I saw Milo, he was promoting Orlando and I was booked in his town. When he saw me, he motioned to me and said, "Come in the dressing room." When I walked in, he said, "Kalt, you better wipe your feet before you get in my ring." He was deadly serious about that. He had the cleanest ring cover I had ever seen. It was immaculate. He had mats at the top of the ring steps for the boys to wipe their feet on and he had it cleaned after every show.

My last match in Florida during that go-around took place in St. Petersburg on the July 22. Three days later, I was wrestling in the Charlotte territory for Jim Crockett Sr.

Cowboy Luttrall was responsible for booking me out to the Charlotte territory. In those days, promoters helped each other out by sending talent back and forth. For instance, Luttrall would call Jim Crockett and say, "Hey, Jim. I've got this boy … Don Kalt. He's good. I'm bringing somebody else in, so I need to find someplace for him to go."

Crockett would say, "Okay, send him up here."

If Luttrall needed talent, he would call someone like Crockett and ask if he had any wrestlers he could send his way. That's how most of us got booked from territory to territory. Most of the time, we didn't even know we were being sent out. We were called into the office and were told, "Jim Crockett needs you in Charlotte. You start on July twenty-fifth." That's how I got booked most of the time. For the most part, I didn't have problems with the promoters, so they were always willing to help me find another place to go.

On the other hand, if a promoter didn't like you, they'd call you in and say, "You gotta find a place to go, son. I can't use you after this week." When they did that, you had to take it upon yourself to find a place to go. That wasn't easy because you had to sell yourself. If a promoter sells you, the other promoters are going to listen, but it's much harder to get into a territory when you don't have backing.

In October, I returned home to make a few shots in the Columbus and Pittsburgh territories, after which time I returned to Florida for six months. During that time in Columbus, I wrestled two guys I had met in the ring before … Bill Miller and Ruffy Silverstein. This time, however, they treated me like one of the boys and we had good matches.

I wrestled former boxing champ Primo Carnera one night. He was huge. In fact, he was so big, they nicknamed him "The Ambling Alp." Carnera won the world heavyweight boxing title on June 29, 1933 when he knocked out Jack Sharkey in the outdoor Madison Square Garden Bowl in Queens. Fans and sportswriters were convinced the mob had fixed the fight, and it didn't

help matters when Primo won his next two fights by decision and lost the title in a third. Max Baer knocked him down eleven times in eleven rounds. Carnera did nothing noteworthy in boxing after that and retired in 1938. He attempted a comeback in 1945, but quit shortly afterwards and turned to professional wrestling in 1946. Like Haystack Calhoun and Andre the Giant [Andre Roussimoff], Carnera was a special attraction. He wasn't the type of guy promoters could build a territory around, or book for any length of time. He came into a territory to draw a big house or two, and then left.

On the night we wrestled, I went to the ring first. Of course, Carnera was a fan-favorite, so the people booed me as I strutted down the aisle. As I said, Carnera was big, but he also had trouble walking and was clumsy. After climbing up onto the ring apron, he pushed down the top rope and stepped over it.

The match was supposed to be simple. I was there for nothing more than to be hamburger for Carnera. He was supposed to get into the ring, immediately grab me, whip me into the ropes, and catch me in a bear hug as I rebounded. However, things didn't quite go as planned.

Everything was fine until he whipped me towards the ropes. The ropes, however, weren't as tight as they should have been, so when I hit them, one of the ropes came unhooked from the ring post. It was one of those moments where everything happened in slow motion. I stumbled coming off the ropes and the top of my head caught Carnera on the chin. As I stood there watching, that giant went down. It was like a scene from the Bible … David and Goliath. They told the timekeeper to ring the bell and got me out of that ring so quickly. They came up with some convoluted reason to disqualify me and award the match to Carnera.

I remember the ropes coming loose one other time. The promoter ran down to ringside and told the timekeeper to stop the match so they could fix the ring. I wasn't going to stop. That would have killed all our heat and everything we had done to that point. We had less than a couple of minutes left to wrestle, so I grabbed my opponent, pushed him into one of the corners, and began to beat him with one of the turnbuckles. I wanted to do anything I could to keep the attention away from the problem. When the

referee ordered me to stop, I continued my onslaught. He then disqualified me and our match ended with a logical conclusion.

During my second run in the Florida territory, which began on November 16, I met another young wrestler named Dick Steinborn. He was the son of Milo Steinborn, the "old man" who had given me such a beating in Daytona Beach.

Dick and I hit it off from the start. The first time we met was when we wrestled each other in Tampa on January 11, 1954. Dick had been in the business since 1951, so he had a lot more experience than I did. When we wrestled, we really seemed to jell. We knew what the other was going to do before he did it. I loved wrestling guys like that. There weren't very many of them, but it was nice to wrestle guys who didn't have to talk in the ring through the entire match. When I did wrestle guys like that, it was always, "Duh, can you repeat that?" And when they talked, they talked carny, which I didn't always understand.

I had heard the boys talking in carny on the street outside the Columbus wrestling office when I was first breaking into the business. I didn't know what they hell they were saying. I forget who I asked, but he told me it was simple to learn. That was easy for him to say. I could barely speak proper English, much less something that sounded to me like a foreign language. He said, "I'll teach you an easy word … your name."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Your name is Don, so in carny, it's De-a-zon."

I was amazed. "Say something else." I didn't know what to tell him to say because I can't spell. I didn't know what word began with what letter.

"Okay. You've gotta go by the sound. For instance, the word saw. Se-a-zaw."

If someone's in the ring and says, "Ge-a-zet a he-a-zold," you'd better know what he's saying. You can't say, "Huh?"

Eddie Graham really pushed me to learn it. He talked it so fast that I really had to work hard to decipher what he was saying. I didn't want to screw up because he was a veteran.

I bypassed a lot of that stuff. I wanted to learn Buddy Rogers' method … just do it! Figure out what your opponent is doing. Think ahead of him. Watch his moves. If his leg is out in the open, are you going to ignore it? No. He's giving it to you. If his arm is out there, you're going to take it. If his head is tilted towards you, grab it. If he throws you off, watch the way he stands. Is he waiting for me to hit him with a tackle or is he going to clothesline me? You can tell what he wants by paying attention to what he does.

I go to some of these independent shows today and most of the guys can't see past their noses. I was sitting in the dressing room one night and listened to two guys talk for an hour about what they were going to do in their match. When they went to the ring, they didn't do any of it. They forgot what they had talked about.

While Dick and I were in the dressing room, we didn't talk about anything pertaining to the match. We just went to the ring and wrestled. The first thing I did was get him in a headlock. I remember that because that's the first thing I always wanted to do. I'd push my opponent against the ropes, the referee would tell me to break, and as we separated, I'd snatch him in another headlock right off the ropes. Boy, the people would go crazy. When I pulled him off the ropes, he knew exactly what to do, and I knew what it was he was going to do. He was going to push me off into the ropes on the other side of the ring. Now, at that point, I had a choice. I would either get back body-dropped, clothes-lined, or he would jump over me and I would continue on to come off the ropes on the other side of the ring. I could tell what he was going to do through nothing more than eye contact. If I chose to sidestep him, he would snatch me in a headlock and take me over. We would lie on the mat and he would work the hold while we decided what we were going to do next.

They booked us together everywhere. I loved working with him. We also hung around together when we weren't wrestling. Steinborn and I were always doing stupid stuff. We were like two kids away from home for the

first time, looking to get into some kind of mischief. Okay, I admit it. I’m still like that. Dick and I would pull up next to a mailbox, light a cherry bomb (when they were still powerful and not like the oversized firecrackers they sell today), put it into the mailbox, and slam the lid shut. We would take off and watch the mailbox explode. We would go to the next mailbox and do the same thing.

Dick bought a new convertible. He was so proud of that car. The horn made the sound of a cow mooing. He’d pull up close to somebody’s rear bumper and blow that horn. They’d look around with the strangest expression on their face.

One day, I told him to pull over so I could take a piss. It had been raining, and when he pulled over onto the grass, he didn’t pay attention to the ground. He wound up with the rear tires spinning in mud. When I finished my business, I got behind the car and pushed. While I did that, he decided to honk the horn. "Moo-ooo!" Dick got out of the car and pointed towards the field on our right. I saw a whole slew of cows walking towards us. The more Dick honked the horn, the faster they walked. "Isn’t that funny?" he asked. "Watch this."

"Moo-ooo. Moo-ooo."

We were drinking beer and laughing like hell. What we didn’t notice was a huge bull up on a hill. He was looking at us and he didn’t look happy. I could tell he didn’t like us messing around with his old ladies. I said, "Hey, Dick. Let’s get out of here."

He didn’t listen. He just kept honking the horn. All of a sudden, that bull took off and came towards us at full speed. Just before he reached the fence, he stopped and pawed at the ground. I thought, "This son-of-a-bitch is ready to charge us."

Dick kept pushing the horn. "Moo-ooo!"

That bull charged towards us and hit that fence so hard I thought it was going to splinter into tiny pieces. "Stop it, Dick!" I yelled. "He’s gonna

come out here. Dammit! Stop! Don’t do it again." He did it again. That bull backed up and pawed at the ground. I said, "Let’s get out of here, dammit!"

Dick jumped in and pushed down on the accelerator. The wheels almost got enough traction to move us forward, but they began to spin again. I was looking back at the bull and could see him begin to move. "He’s comin’, dammit! Get us out of here!" That bull crashed through the fence and into the side of Dick’s new car. When he did, the wheels made contact with solid ground and we took off.

Another time, I was at the house where he was living in North Carolina. It was a big house and it was pretty dark at night when the lights weren’t turned on. He had a tape recorder. While he was away on an errand, I turned on the recorder and, in low, menacing voices, began talking. I used two different voices, both of them in a manner in which a gangster might talk.

"Hey, Joe."

"Yeah, Squeaky?"

"We gotta kill this guy."

"Yeah, I know, man. We gotta get ‘im."

"We need to blow his brains out."

When Dick got home and opened the door, I turned on the recorder and quietly pressed the play button. "Hey, Joe."

Steinborn stopped in his tracks.

"Yeah, Squeaky?"

Steinborn calls out, "Squeaky?"

He stood there for a long time while that recording played. He didn’t see me sitting in the chair on the other side of the room. He thought two guys were in the room with him.

Today, 50 years later, whenever he calls me, the first thing he says is, "Squeaky?" Or he says, "Two tackles, drop down, and get it again."

One night in April 1954, our luck ran out when Steinborn and I got into trouble with the police. After wrestling each other, we went outside and saw Jackie Fargo's car parked outside a bar, so we thought we'd go over and let the air out of his tires. We were giggling like a couple of schoolgirls. I told him I was going into the alley because I really had to crap. While I was pulling my pants down, Jackie walked out of the building and saw the tire. At the same time, two policemen walked around the corner of the building with their flashlights aimed towards me. I didn't waste any time pulling up my pants. One of the cops says, "What are you doing back there? Are you going to the bathroom?"

"No, sir."

Technically, that was a true statement since I hadn't begun.

"Then why were your pants down around your ankles? Get out here." When he shone his flashlight in our faces, he said, "You guys are rasslers, ain't ya?" He leaned forward and looked closer. "Yeah, I've seen you two guys wrestle each other."

Oh, boy. That was it. We had broken the number one, cardinal rule of wrestling. Never socialize with the guy you're wrestling. The police reported the incident to Cowboy Luttrall, who promptly chewed out our asses and shipped us back to Charlotte. We spent almost two months there and, once again, Steinborn and I wrestled each other many times. Did we learn our lesson and heed the words of warning from the promoters and avoid each other in public? No. We continued to hang out together, but we tried to be more discreet about it.

I bought my first car while I was in the Charlotte territory. I bought it from Pat Fraley, one of the wrestlers, for $300. It was a manual-transmission, two-door Chevy coupe that looked almost new. I didn't know how to drive when I bought it, much less operate a stick shift. I didn't know what a clutch was, either. Joanne said she'd teach me. She took me downtown, of all places, and told me what to do. I can't even imagine what people who

saw us were thinking. That car was bouncing and jerking all over the road. I never did get the hang of driving one of those mothers. Steinborn sat in the back and listened to me grind through one gear after the other. Fingernails on a blackboard were nothing compared to the sounds the gears made while I was learning. It took me a long time to learn how to drive it, and for the first few months, whenever we made a trip, I had to ask somebody else to drive it.

In June, we were back in Tampa. Three months later, I was sent to wrestle for Roy Welch and Nick Gulas in Tennessee, Missouri and Arkansas. That territory presented me with an opportunity to work with a whole new crew of guys, most of whom I had never heard of: Con Bruno, Antone Leone, Tommy Phelps, Frank Taylor, Billy Raburn, Eddie Gossett, Ed Francis, and Scotty Williams. One of the wrestlers I met in Little Rock while I was there was someone I had heard so much about — National Wrestling Alliance [NWA] world heavyweight champion, Lou Thesz. Everywhere I went, people were talking about him. I didn't get to wrestle him during that period in time, but I had an opportunity to see him wrestle Gorgeous George. I have to say I didn't think he was as good as people made him out to be.

He was much, much better.

In fact, other than Buddy Rogers (and his style was completely different from Lou's, so you really can't fairly compare the two), Thesz was the absolute best technician in the ring I had ever seen. He moved like a cat and everything he did meant something.

Lou was a guy who never changed with the times. His gimmick was wrestling and I don't think people would have believed him if he had changed. In a way, I hate to refer to wrestling as his "gimmick" because he was a true, legitimate, skilled wrestler, but his "wrestling" gimmick was so strong that people lined up at the box office to see him wrestle. He didn't need a "character" to get over. He was one of the exceptions to the new rule.

Later in my career, I was booked against Lou on a TV card in Oklahoma City. I was a little scared and nervous. I had heard the stories about him slapping guys in the face, especially those who weren't wrestlers in the pure sense. He didn't have respect for anybody who didn't respect what he

thought the business should be. He didn’t like gimmicks. No, that’s not strong enough. He hated gimmicks.

Thesz was being promoted for a house [arena] match in Tulsa with Baron Michele Leone. I was there for no other reason than to do a job for Thesz on television. What an honor and a pleasure it was to be asked to do a job for Thesz back then. In the dressing room that night, I told Bob Orton, "I don’t know what to do."

Bob said, "Don’t go into the ring acting like Buddy Rogers or Gorgeous George. Don’t wear a robe. Just wear tights, shoes, and put a towel around your neck."

That’s what I did. We wrestled that night and Thesz made me look good.

Unfortunately for Michele Leone, he didn’t get off as lightly. Thesz didn’t like Leone. Actually, "didn’t like" might be a bit mild of a description for the feelings Thesz had for Leone. Thesz hated Leone, and the feeling was reciprocal. When the bell rang to start their match, Thesz backed Leone up against the ropes and slapped him in the face as hard as he could. The other wrestlers, not to mention every fan in the building, heard Thesz’ open-hand pop against the side of Leone’s face. The boys all went, "Oooh." Leone ducked under the ropes and scooted out to the floor of the arena. For a few seconds, we thought he was going to head back to the dressing room. We really thought he was going to do it, but after hesitating for a bit, he got back into the ring.

In October 1954, I wrestled Antone Leone [not to be confused with "Michele" Leone] in both Memphis and Little Rock. He was a good guy, but a really strange bird. He would wear a shirt, two sweaters, a coat, two top coats, gloves, and a tassel cap … in hot weather. He always had a cigar in his mouth, his hair was always uncombed, he never was clean shaven, and he talked constantly about his companion … an invisible, talking doll named Jake.

We also wrestled in a small town in Oklahoma. There wasn’t much to do in that town, so the building was packed with redneck cowboys. He came to the ring wearing three pairs of trunks and the strings of all three pairs were

hanging on the outside. His shoelaces weren’t tucked into his boots and he hadn’t shaved for a couple of days.

I was still green and didn’t know much about crowd control, or how bad things could get in certain circumstances. Antone got a hammerlock on me and whispered in my ear to "sell it." I started crying and screaming for mercy. Each time he tightened up on the hammerlock, he would stomp his foot on the mat so the people knew he was putting on the pressure. I was a young, good-looking babyface [good guy], while Leone was a hated heel [bad guy], so I didn’t have to do much to get the people on my side. Even so, every time I got out of the hold, he’d get it again. He’d push me against the ropes and hit me coming off with a wild haymaker, sending me to the mat, where he would put the boots to my head. He was so convincing that the local police came into the ring, handcuffed him, and took him back to the dressing room.

When I walked into the dressing room, he was screaming, "Tell ‘em, Kalt. Tell ‘em!"

I was taught to protect the business, so I wasn’t going to let the cat out of the bag. Leone kept on. "Tell ‘em, Kalt. Tell ‘em I wasn’t tryin’ to hurt you. Tell ‘em!"

I said, "I don’t’ know what the fuck you’re talkin’ about. You were tryin’ to kill me, man."

He got hot. "Tell ‘em, dammit! Tell ‘em it’s a work."

I got a puzzled look on my face and asked, "A what?"

The cops were serious. They wanted to take him to jail. I finally tried to tell them that he really didn’t hurt me … without telling them, if that makes sense. I didn’t want to expose the business. "He really wasn’t hurting me that bad."

"So he wasn’t hurting you?"

"He was hurting me, but he wasn’t hurting me too much." I didn’t know how to explain it without telling them it had all been a work. I didn’t want to say anything because I had been taught to protect the wrestling business.

"Well, make up your mind! Did he hurt you or didn’t he?"

I finally said something like, "Nah, he wasn’t really hurting me."

They didn’t seem convinced, but luckily for Leone, the local promoter who ran the town managed to convince the cops to release him.

I can still hear Leone’s voice in my head, "Tell ‘em, Kalt. Tell ‘em!"

Antone and I went to a restaurant one time for dinner. When we finished, he ordered a piece of pie. As I watched him, he pulled a bug out of his coat pocket and slipped it between the crust and the filling. "What are you doing?" I asked.

He motioned the waitress over to the table, made a face, and said, "M’am, there’s a bug in my pie."

He didn’t have to pay for a thing. They apologized and told him the meal was on the house. I couldn’t believe it.

A couple of months later, I did the same thing in another restaurant, and it worked. However, I learned a very valuable lesson a month later. When I tried it again, the owner of that particular restaurant came to the table and told me to "pay your bill and get the fuck out of my restaurant."

If you learn just this one thing from my experiences, this book will be worth every penny you paid for it.

Don’t ever pull that stunt twice at the same restaurant.

Leone loved to play tricks on people. One time, Leone and another wrestler went to a restaurant and he got out of the car wearing sunglasses and carrying a cane. He tapped the cane on the sidewalk and walked in as if he was blind. During the meal, the other wrestler talked one of the girls who worked there into meeting them at his motel room later that night. Leone sat

in a chair on one side of the room while the guy undressed the girl and had sex with her. Playing on her sympathy for Leone’s plight, the guy talked her into having sex with Leone. While she was doing her number on him, Leone threw off his glasses and said, "I can see! Praise the Lord! You’re so good that I can see!"

They never told the girl that it was all a rib. No doubt, she believes the story to this day, and probably tells all her friends about the time she gave sight to a blind man.

Ripper also had an imaginary dog. When we would walk into a building, he would hold open the door, like he was letting somebody go in before him.

Those were funny, funny ribs, and Leone was one of the best when it came to pulling them on people. From start to finish, he put everything he had into every rib and never got out of character.

March 1955 would find me in the Toledo territory. It was there that I would reunite with a wrestler named Ray Stevens, someone I had become good friends with when I was learning the business in Columbus, and it was around that time that both of our wrestling careers took off like a rocket.

Chapter 6
Blond-Haired Faggots

Two guys who really made an impression on me during this time were Reggie Lisowski and Art Neilson [Art Nelson]. I liked them because, like Buddy Rogers, they had blond hair and they were really tough and mean. I always liked the heels [bad guys]. From the first day I had seen the Lisowskis on TV, wrestling stuck in my head. I knew that was something I wanted to do.

The booker in Toledo was an old-time wrestler named Martino Angelo [Angelo Curto]. In early 1955, six days after I arrived in Ohio, he told me, "You're going to ride to Sandusky with Reggie Lisowski and Stan Neilson."

I couldn't believe it. I was really nervous because they were two guys I had seen on television when I was still a kid. They weren't too much older than me, but it really freaked me out. When I got into the back seat of the car, they were in the front seat drinking beer. "You wanna beer, kid?"

"Nah." I didn't drink too much back then because I was a bodybuilder.

I really had my mind blown years later when I traveled with Buddy Rogers. To me, it was like meeting a king or a queen. I met all my heroes and became friends with them. They liked me because I was respectful. My dad always taught me to say, "Yes, sir," and "No, sir."

The first time I laid eyes on Ray Stevens, I was in Al Haft's office. I had just broken into the wrestling business and Ray walked into the office with the Great Scott. They were both dressed in kilts. As soon as I got to know him a little, I made fun of him and kidded him about wearing women's clothes. He paid me back in spades for my teasing.

Ray wasn't wrestling when we first met. He was the valet for the Great Scott. His job was to walk to the ring with the Great Scott and bring his

jacket and gear back to the dressing room. Like Buddy Rogers, the Great Scott was a main-event guy, so he was on the road every day. Likewise, Ray was on the road with him. Whenever Ray was in town, though, he would hang around the wrestling office and work out in the upstairs gym.

Ray's goal was to actually wrestle, so he worked out at the gym all the time. One day, he was working out in the ring with the boys. When I say he was "working out," I mean he was "shooting" [legitimately wrestling]. People don't realize it, but Ray was a pretty good amateur wrestler and shooter in his day. He had to be to hold his own against some of the talent they had in Columbus at the time.

The day we met, he asked me if I wanted to work out with him. I never turned down an opportunity to wrestle. I loved being in the ring, and to have an opportunity to work out with someone else who was just learning was the best thing that could have happened to me. We worked out together every day. In the ring, we would trade holds and shoot against each other. We loved to shoot with each other. When we got tired of shooting, we would begin playing around and trying new things. He'd say, "Let's try this," and later on, I'd say, "Let's try that." I'd throw him into the ropes and drop him with a clothesline when he rebounded off, and then we'd reverse roles.

He did something one day that amazed me. When I whipped him into one of the corner turnbuckles, he did a flip, hooked his foot over the top turnbuckle, and hung there. There must have been six or seven other wrestlers watching at the time. Every one of us stopped and stood there with our mouths hanging open. Nobody … and I mean nobody … could believe what they had seen Ray do. That maneuver would be performed years later by Ric Flair, but it was Ray who invented the move.

Ray and I didn't like to work out and try new things in the ring above the office because the other boys hung around there. We didn't want anybody to see what we were doing because they would steal our ideas, so Al Haft let us wrestle in a ring he had in his barn.

We were both green [inexperienced] and we liked a lot of the same things — like motorcycles — so we hung out together a lot. Ray knew a couple of

guys in Columbus who had Harley-Davidson Panhead motorcycles. They would loan them to us and we would make trips together. I don’t know why those guys trusted us with their bikes, but who was I to argue with them? We rode them everywhere. Al Haft wasn’t too keen on us riding bikes to the towns because he was afraid we’d get hurt, but he didn’t order us not to. Not that we would have listened to him, anyway.

One of my favorite ribs involved those motorcycles. One day, we left Columbus and made a 200-mile trip on them. Buddy Rogers and Joe Louis were on the card that night. Al Haft used Louis, who is considered to be one of the greatest world heavyweight boxing champions of all time, as a special referee. When we walked into the dressing room, Buddy’s eyes lit up. He walked over to us and asked, "Hey, man. We flew in here. Can we catch a ride back with you guys?"

Before I could open my mouth, Ray jumped in and said, "Sure. We’d be glad to have you ride with us."

He didn’t tell them we came in on motorcycles. I picked right up on what Ray was thinking. "Sure, you can catch a ride with us."

Rogers and Louis were on last that night. By the time they finished their match and took their showers, everyone else had gone home, so the only choice they had was to ride with us. You should have seen Rogers and Louis sitting on the back of our bikes. We had our gear stowed away in the saddle bags. They had to hold their suitcases between their legs. Joe Louis was sitting behind me. Buddy was sitting behind Ray. They cussed us all the way home. "You assholes."

By the time Ray made his pro debut, I was already wrestling in Pennsylvania and Ohio, so I didn’t get to see him in the ring until we both showed up in the Toledo territory. I understand, however, that his first match in Columbus was not a professional match. He made his debut there on November 6, 1952, in an "amateur" match against Jack Cleemans. He had just turned 17 years old two months earlier. A year and a half later, he was wrestling in Columbus in the semi-final against wrestlers like Eddie Gossett (who would later change his name to Eddie Graham and wrestle and promote in Florida) and Danny McShain.

For me, this was a time of "firsts." Ray was in Toledo when I got there in March 1955, but he only stayed for a week. For the next two months, I got my first taste of being "featured" in a territory. Cliff Maupin, the promoter, booked me regularly in semi-final spots against talent like King Kong Kox, Bull Montana, and Bill Savage.

During April and May 1955, I was featured in a series of main events in Sandusky, Ohio, against Bull Montana. On May 23, two months into my feud with Montana, Ray Stevens returned and wrestled Billy Fox in the opening match. During the third fall of my match with Montana later that night, Ray, wearing street clothes, jumped into the ring to "help" me against my opponent. The referee disqualified me for his interference and awarded the match to Montana. That was the first appearance ever of the Ray Stevens-Don Kalt tag team.

That night, before we left the arena, promoter Cliff Maupin told Ray and I to go to a jeweler and get some belts made. We were going to be the "Tri-States tag team champions," the title which later was called the MWA [Midwest Wrestling Association] junior heavyweight tag team title. Three nights later, on May 26 in the Toledo Sports Arena, Ray and I teamed up for the first time, wrestling Gino Angelo and Bill Savage in our first defense of the tag team title.

After the matches that night, Ray introduced me to his wife, Therese Theis, who was one of the girl wrestlers. In turn, she introduced me to a lot of the other girls. I hung around with them a lot when Ray and I were tag teaming together. I didn’t date them. I just liked being around them. Their stories were always good, especially the ones about promoters hitting on them and promising them better bookings if they "put out." The one I liked the most was Penny Banner. Ray did, too. She was a beautiful girl and a great performer. In my opinion, she was before her time. She would have done well in wrestling even today.

It also was during this time that I bleached my hair for the first time. I always had light-colored hair, but it had a reddish tint to it. One morning, Ray told me to stop by his house later that night. When I got there, Therese told me she was going to bleach my hair. Things have improved a lot since then. Today, people "color" their hair with safe chemicals, but in those days,

we used hydrogen peroxide to bleach out the color. That method often damaged our hair, drying it out so much that our hair would become brittle and break. That's all we had, though, so that's what Therese used. It smelled terrible. The first time she applied it, my hair turned orange. She repeated the process and it worked.

Since that day, I've had blond hair. I had to be careful, though. If I left the chemicals on my hair too long, it would burn my scalp like nobody's business. My hair is naturally light now, but I don't like it when the grey shows, so every now and then, I spray it with bleach. I'll go outside, stand in the sun for an hour, and then wash it out.

And for everyone who has wondered about the old saying, I'm here to tell you … blonds do have more fun.

Ray and I wrestled as a team around the circuit for the next two weeks until, in June, Cliff Maupin sent the two of us down to Florida, once again, to wrestle for Cowboy Luttrall.

A funny thing happened shortly after I arrived in the Florida territory when I made a trip to Orlando with Eddie Graham and Art Nelson. We stopped to take a leak at a bridge where three kids were fishing with bamboo pools. They were sitting on the bridge railing with their legs dangling over the side. Eddie walked over to them and asked, "Are you boys catching any fish?"

"Nope."

He looked over the side of the bridge at the water and then asked, "Can you boys swim?"

"Yeah."

Ploop, ploop, ploop. He pushed all three of them off the railing.

For the better part of a month, Ray and I wrestled against other opponents in singles matches. On July 16, we teamed up in Daytona Beach in a handicap match against El Toro (Bibber McCoy under a mask). The

following week, we were wrestling against each other. Ray and I worked against each other quite often and we had as much fun working against each other as we had when we were in Ohio as partners. I don’t know if Luttrall had long-term plans for a series of grudge matches between the two of us, but we did something that caused him to have some doubts as to whether or not we were reliable enough to do business with him.

On Saturday night, July 23, 1955, I teamed with Doran O’Hara [George Overhuls] to wrestle Ray Stevens and Harry Smith at the Beach Arena in Daytona Beach. During the match, Ray back-dropped me way up into the air. As I came down, I flipped over and landed solidly on my feet, rather than my back. When I turned around, Ray was standing in a corner of the ring with his mouth wide open. He couldn’t believe it. I did a Buddy Rogers strut to the center of the ring, totally impressed with myself and my abilities.

Now, to be completely honest, it had all been a total accident, and it shocked me as much as it did Ray. I had no intention of landing on my feet, but when I reached the mat, I was in the perfect position to land feet first. And, to be even more honest, I was out of position to do what I should have done, which was land on my back. In other words, it wasn’t due to my ability. It was because I had messed up by not flipping over far enough. I didn’t admit it at the time, though. I took full credit for doing something that turned out to be pretty cool.

Later that night, after the matches, Ray, my wife, and I left the arena and headed down to Miami Beach.

My wife, Joanne, was driving. I was lying down in the front seat with my head in her lap and Ray was lying in the back seat. A car full of kids pulled up beside us and they began yelling derogatory things at my wife. Obviously, the kids didn’t see anyone in the car other than my wife, so they were going to have some fun at my wife’s expense. When their comments changed from friendliness to that with a sexual undertone, she got scared and woke me up. When Ray and I sat up, they shifted their comments from Joanne to us. "Hey, you blond-haired faggots!"

That was it. I told her to pull over because we were going to take care of them. She kept saying, "Don’t do this. Don’t do this. Let’s just keep driving and ignore them."

I wasn’t going to ignore the filthy comments they had made to her, so I said, "Pull over, dammit!"

When Joanne pulled to the curb, they pulled up behind us. Ray was up and out of the car before I could get mine open. I got to the car first because I went for the driver’s side, while Ray had to run around to take care of the passenger. I nailed the driver before he could get his feet on the ground. As Ray approached the passenger side, someone got out and stuck him in the eye with a broom handle. I heard Ray yell, "Oh, my eye! My eye!"

Ray took off running. He wasn’t leaving me. He was just trying to get away from the guy with the broom handle so he could prepare for what looked to be an all-out battle. The next thing I know, all four guys were on me and I was lashing out in every direction. All of a sudden, I felt something pull up tight against my throat. The guy with the broom stick had looped it over my head and was using it to choke me. I couldn’t breathe and knew I was on the verge of passing out. I was gasping for breath and pulling on the stick when I heard something go WHACK! The pressure on my throat disappeared and, when I looked around, I saw the guy who had been choking me lying on the ground. I heard the noise again and another guy went down.

I later learned that when Ray recovered and came back to the car, he told Joanne to open the trunk. He grabbed the jack handle and used it to beat the guys off of me. One of the guys ran back to their car and jumped in. Ray followed him and smashed out all the windows. I was yelling, "Stop, Ray! Dammit! Stop!" The fourth guy ran down the road and, like a wild beast sensing prey in flight, Ray took off after him. He looked like a madman with that jack handle in his hand.

I yelled to Joanne and told her to get into the car. I ran over, jumped in the car, and said, "We’ve gotta go get ‘im." I turned the car around and took off in the direction Ray had run. When I looked down the road, I saw Ray … being handcuffed by the cops. "Oh, shit," I thought. There wasn’t anything I

could do, so I stopped, casually turned the car around, and drove in the other direction. Two thoughts were running through my mind. One, if the promoter finds out we were together, he'll fire us. Two, if both of us got arrested, we'd both have to post bail, and we didn't have the money.

Before I drove a hundred yards, I said to Joanne, "Dammit! They got Ray. I gotta go back. Fuck the business. I gotta go back."

By the time I got back, they were gone, so I drove to a gas station and asked for directions to the police station. I walked into the station and turned myself in.

The next day, Herbie Freeman came to the station and bailed us out. Oh, boy. I knew we were in trouble. Sure enough, when Ray and I got back to Tampa, we both got an ear-banging from old man Luttrall. If we didn't have a cauliflower ear from wrestling, the ass-chewing we got from Luttrall would have given us one.

The previous Tuesday night in Tampa, July 19, Ray and I had wrestled each other to a draw. The following week, four nights after the incident, we wrestled in a rematch in Tampa with a "winner-take-all" stipulation. Thank goodness there was no such thing as the Internet back then. If there had been, the people in Tampa would have known everything there was to know about the incident before we had been bailed out of jail. They would have wondered why two sworn enemies, who were feuding in the ring, had been out carousing together. As it was, I don't think anyone was the wiser … at least on Florida's west coast. The Miami Daily News saw to it, however, that everyone on the east coast knew about it. Luttrall pulled Stevens from the card in Miami the following week and pulled us both from the Friday night Daytona Beach lineup. Instead of wrestling in Daytona Beach that day, we appeared in court.

Two huge security guards escorted the four boys into the court. One was wearing a cast on his right arm and another had his hand bandaged up. They bitched about how we attacked them without provocation, claiming we were professional wrestlers who could have killed them. The judge was pretty wise. "They didn't hurt you with wrestling holds, did they?"

They didn't have a case, but Ray and I, along with two of the youth, were found guilty of disorderly conduct and fined $25 each. That was our payoff for the night in Daytona and, at the time, that was a lot of money. We could buy a week's groceries with 25 bucks.

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Miami FL Daily News, Saturday, July 23, 1955

SCHOOL YOUTHS BATTLE WRESTLERS AT BEACH

Four Miami boys learned today that things are not always what they may seem.

The youths, all 18, were cruising about Miami Beach and spotted two young men with long blond hair. They drew with an obvious conclusion, police said, and shouted at the men with long hair.

That was when the fight started.

The men with long blond hair, it seemed, were two professional wrestlers who wear their hair in curly tresses for the delight of their fans and to provide agonizing hand holds for their opponents.

Patrolmen Dave Schulman and Morrill Turk stumbled on to the aftermath of the fight when they spotted Ray Stevens, one of the wrestlers, running about the street at the intersection of Abbott Avenue and Indian Creek Drive.

Blood was streaming down his face from a cut on his cheek. His left eye was closed. The patrolmen said Stevens appeared to be out of his head.

A little further down the street the patrolmen stopped a car containing the four boys. They were also in pretty bad shape.

Fred A. Kalil, 19, of 10106 NE 1st Ave., suffered lacerations and a possible fracture of the right arm; Jim Shea, 19, former Edison football star, of 637 NE 82nd St., suffered cuts on his back, and Dean Eichelberger, 18, of 208 NW 84th St., suffered cuts on his right hand; John Wright, 18, of 226 NW 67th St., was uninjured.

The boys were treated at Mt. Sinai Hospital and released.

Don Kalt, the other wrestler, was not injured. He and Stevens told policemen the boys shouted insulting remarks, which started the fight.

The boys admitted to patrolmen A.L. Godber and Arthur Maginnis that they shouted at the two wrestlers after noting the long blond hair. They insisted,

however, it was nothing more than "hello" in German.
The wife of wrestler Don Kalt gave a different version of the fracas. She said she was driving her husband's car with her two-year-old baby on the seat beside her. Stevens and Kalt were in the rear seat, dozing.
"This car full of boys pulled alongside and started yelling at me," said Mrs. Kalt. "This sort of thing is always happening."
She said she pulled to the curb to let the boys go by, but instead, they stopped their car and got out to talk to her.
Sensing there would be trouble when the wrestlers awoke, Mrs. Kalt said she yelled: "Please stay away!"
The warning, she said, was too late.
Both the wrestlers and the boys were charged with disorderly conduct. They were released on $25 bond each pending a hearing in city court Monday.

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Associated Press, Sunday, July 24, 1955

A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY, YOUTHS ADMIT AFTER HOSPITAL VISIT
MIAMI BEACH – It was a case of mistaken identity, four youths reported today after three of them were treated at a hospital. Patrolman Dave Schulman relates the story:
The four high school boys were riding about last night when they spotted a car occupied by two men wearing long curly hair. The boys called out remarks which the longhairs resented. There was a general scuffle. Three of the youths wound up with cuts and bruises. One had a broken arm. The fourth stayed out of it all and was unhurt.
One of the long-haired gents was cut, the other uninjured. All concerned were charged with disorderly conduct and booked at city jail.
There the truth was learned by the youths -- Jim Shea, Dean Eichelberger, Fred Kalil and John Wright, all 17.
The men with long hair were Ray Stevens and Don Kalt, professional wrestlers who wore their hair that way for "stage" effect.

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Miami FL Daily News, Friday, July 29, 1955

TWO WRESTLERS AND TWO BOYS FINED FOR FIGHT

Acting as a referee in an unscheduled wrestling bout, Miami Beach judge Milton Feller today found four of the participants guilty of disorderly conduct, and dismissed charges against the other two.

The charges grew out of a six-sided brawl which developed between four Miami youths and two wrestlers early Saturday morning on Indian Creek Drive.

Judge Feller fined the wrestlers, Ray Stevens and Don Kalt, staying at the Corsair Hotel, $25 each. He assessed the same fine against two of the boys, Dean Eichelberger, 18, of 208 NW 84th St., and John Wright, 18, of 226 NW 67th St.

Charges were dismissed against Fred Kalil, 1018 NE 1st Ave., former Miami Edison football star, who received a broken arm in the fray; and James Shea, 19, of 657 NE 82nd St., who was cut.

Dan D. Sullivan, Miami Crime Commission head, appeared as a character witness for young Kalil.

The fracas started when the wrestlers and the youths exchanged words as their cars were going north on Indian Creek Drive.

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One week after the court case, Luttrall shipped the two of us back to Toledo. We were damaged goods because we couldn’t wrestle in the Daytona Beach area after word spread about the fight. A few days after the incident, Ray and I had some publicity pictures taken. Ray’s black eye is evident in the photo.

For the next two months, Ray and I wrestled as a team, defending the junior heavyweight tag team title against various wrestlers, most of whom weren’t regular tag team partners, but were thrown together for one or two cards.

Ray and I did crazy things in the ring. So crazy, in fact, that we could have seriously hurt ourselves. We didn’t care, though. Like most young kids, we thought we were invulnerable. We would do anything to please the crowd, even if it meant taking ridiculous bumps. Leaping Larry Chene taught me so much about high-risk moves. He showed me how to go over the top rope without touching it, and how to land flat on my back on the arena floor. He taught me how to make a noise that sounded as if my body had cracked into

tiny pieces. Don’t get me wrong. Doing those things hurt, but that didn’t matter because all I cared about was making the people believe. I lived to make them either "hate" or "love" me.

Ray, who was being called the "Wonder Boy" by the newspapers, enjoyed competing with me for attention. Even when we were tag team partners, we competed to see who could take the highest back body-drops. We would take turns letting our opponents throw us way up into the air. I have to admit, try as I might, I couldn’t get as high as Ray could. Ray would do his upside-down flip into the corner, too.

One of the wrestlers I met in Pittsburgh was Ed Francis. Ed was a great performer. He did something in the ring I loved so much that I copied and used it years later. One of the rules I lived by was to never use someone else’s idea when they were in the area. I would take it someplace else where the people have never seen it.

After the ring introductions, while the babyface wrestler was in his corner, pulling on the ropes and with his back to his opponent, Francis would run over and nail him from behind. Ed would pound on the guy until the referee pushed him away. Ed still wore his jacket when he did this. His opponent would charge over to him and throw him across the ring by his jacket. The people went nuts over that. I said to myself, "Wow! I love that."

I did that myself for a while, but when Ray and I teamed together, I told him, "Let’s do the jacket throw like I do, only both of us do it." One of our opponents threw me with my jacket from one corner of the ring, while his partner tossed Ray from the opposite corner, and we landed in the center of the ring at the same time. The two of us rolled out of the ring and onto the floor. It was beautiful and the people loved it.

Cliff Maupin brought Dick the Bruiser — one of the true legends of the wrestling business — to Toledo on September 1, 1955. When I first met him, I was really impressed. Bruiser was built like a gorilla and was somewhat of a rebel. I just stared at him in the dressing room that night. I couldn’t take my eyes off him. I had never seen anyone like him. I spent a lot of time working for Bruiser in later years when he became the promoter of the Indianapolis territory.

Martino Angelo, the booker, would haul Ray and me to the towns. I don’t know why he put up with our antics because we were constantly doing things that would drive a normal person to the brink of insanity. While Angelo was driving, Ray and I would shake our beer cans before opening them and spray each other. By the time we got to the arena, we would be soaking wet, but we didn’t care. I chewed tobacco and spit it on the floor. Nothing we did seemed to faze Angelo. It almost became a game to us. We did anything we could to see if we could get him riled, but he never seemed to be bothered. No matter what we did, the next time we asked him for a ride, he always agreed to take us with him.

One of the old, old-school guys I met in Toledo was Frank Hickey. Now, there was a character if there ever was one, and everybody loved him.

We never knew what Frank would be wearing on any particular night. One night, he’d wrestle under a mask. The next night, he’d be the Spaceman, or Bozo Brown. The boys, however, affectionately called him "Mother Hickey."

Frank didn’t carry a suitcase. He brought a trunk with him. I think he had every piece of clothing he owned in that trunk. Most of it was old and musty, but he had everything pressed, folded and stacked neatly. He used to say, "Everything should be in order. Everything has a place to be."

He had a lot of eccentricities like that. His favorite saying was, "You gotta do it this way, kid. Bing, bing, bing!" I never knew what it meant or why he said it, but he said it all the time. When I made trips with him, the back seat and floor of his car was covered with newspaper. He had newspapers and mats on the front seat, and newspapers lining his trunk. He had all kinds of tools in the trunk. "You gotta have these tools … bing, bing, bing … jack, tire … you gotta have it … bing, bing, bing." And when he came into the dressing room, he put newspaper all over the floor and benches.

When we stayed in a motel, he covered everything with newspaper before he laid out his personal items. "Gotta have this. Gotta have that. Everything in order, kid. Everything in order." He wouldn’t go to bed until his shoes were lined up, and his clothes were laid out, and when he went to bed, he wore long-handled pajamas with the trap door covering his butt.

The first night we stayed together, he rubbed Vaseline all over his face before he got into bed. "What’re you doin’ that for, Frank?"

"It’s easier to shave when you wake up in the morning. Bing, bing, bing. Always put Vaseline on your face."

He used to call Jackie Fargo and me "vest-pocket Buddy Rogerses." In other words, we fell far short of Buddy Rogers when it came to ability. Whenever he did that, we’d do something outrageous that would really get to him. I’d walk up to him with a cigar in my mouth and say, "Hey, Frank. You got a match?"

"Sure."

After he struck the match and held it up so I could light my cigar, I’d produce a $100 bill, light it from the match, and use it to light my cigar. He’d go, "Ah-hhhh! What are you doing?"

For years, people have been telling stories about Dr. Jerry Graham [Jerry Matthews] using $100 bills to light his cigars, but Jackie and I were the first ones to do that.

Jackie and I messed with Frank all the time. We’d get to an arena before he did and put newspaper down on the floor. We’d lay out our suitcases and have all our clothes stacked neatly. He’d come in and say, "Oh, you boys are learning." He really thought he was teaching us something, when, in fact, we were just doing it as a rib.

By mid-1955, wrestling was languishing in New York, primarily due to promoter Toots Mondt’s fondness for horse racing getting in the way of him paying attention to his business. With Madison Square Garden dark since May 16, Al Haft and Ray Fabiani got together and attempted to reboot the territory. Their main draw was Buddy Rogers.

On August 4, their first TV studio wrestling was taped in New York City at the DuMont Telecenter Studio 5, which was located on East 67th Street. The show aired on WABD, Channel 5, with Marty Glickman doing the commentating from ringside. In addition to three preliminary matches, Pat

O’Connor beat my old friend Antone Leone in the feature match, while Don Leo Jonathan [Don Heaton] took the semi-final from George Babich.

What most people didn’t know is that Buddy Rogers was calling the shots. He brought Ray and me in as the Stevens brothers, billing me as "Don Stevens." The wrestler known as "Don Kalt" would never be seen in a ring again.

Our first match took place in Long Island City on October 26 when we wrestled Al (Spider) Galento and Fritz Von Wallick. Rogers booked Ray and me in all their towns — Baltimore, New York City, Long Island City, Hagerstown [MD], Philadelphia — and we made several appearances on the Dumont Telecenter television tapings.

On January 12, 1956, we were booked on the TV tapings and the building was packed with wrestling fans. There were two young guys there at the time who thought they were going to make a name for themselves. The emphasis is on the word "thought." Rogers came down to the dressing room and told them, "Hey, I want you guys to go up there and have one hell of a match with the Stevens brothers. We’re going to be giving them a big push. I want you to get them over. Fly for them."

They refused. "Nope. Ain’t gonna do it."

Buddy got so mad. It was time for us to go on, so Buddy told somebody, "Go kill some time up there. Do something, anything. Talk to the audience," and then he told the Great Scott, "Go put your gear on."

Buddy and the Great Scott put on their ring gear, went upstairs, got into the ring, and put us over like we were champions. They flew through the air, took big bumps, and went over the top rope and into the audience. We were just kids in their eyes, but they were bumping for us "kids" like you’ve never seen anyone bump before. That got us over like nobody has ever gotten over before. Ray and I were counted outside the ring during the third fall, but even though we lost, we were over in a big way, thanks to the efforts of Buddy Rogers and the Great Scott.

They used to play the song, "The Jones Boy," before our match, and Ray and I were the Jones boys. We'd show up at the arenas wearing nice suits, black-and-brown shoes, shirts with the collars turned up, and our hair cut into a crew cut. It got over for awhile.

Unfortunately, Buddy messed things up. Buddy was working on TV one night with Ray and the boom microphone caught him calling shots. The people watching on television could hear it as clear as day. I can't say for sure that it was Rogers' fault, but from what I understand, that killed the promotion. Professional wrestling in New York was dead for a long time after that.

I don't remember the name of the town, but Ray and I wrestled in a small town outside Toledo. They had a radio guy set up there who called the play-by-play of the matches. After we wrestled for an hour, he said, "They've gone one hour. It's over."

Ray said, "Don, go five more minutes."

He wasn't going to stop. When they rang the bell five minutes later, he said, "Keep going."

The radio guy was going nuts. I can still hear him, "They're still wrestling. They're still going. One hour, twenty minutes … and they're still going!"

By then, I was ready to quit, but then the referee got into the act. "Okay, you guys. Go five more minutes."

The people were into our match like no other match I had been in to that point in time. They were hollering, "Go, go, go!"

The promoter came out and said, "That's it. Get out of the ring."

Ray wasn't going to let him tell us what to do. He looked at me, grinned, and said, "Keep going."

Nobody wanted to go home. Even the boys were watching from the back. The people were yelling at the promoter, "Let 'em go."

When it was all said and done, we went two hours. Other than the matches I had with Dick Steinborn, I think that was the best match I ever had.

I suppose I need to give a more honest explanation for why we went so long. Yes, we were having the time of our lives showing off for the people, but in truth, we were both showing off for a girl we both had our sights set on. Don't ask me who got the girl because I don't remember. All I remember is that I was going to keep wrestling until Ray dropped dead in the ring and I won the hand of the fair lady.

While I was in New York, I met a midget named Sky Low Low [Marcel Gauthier]. In my opinion, he was the greatest midget wrestler of all time. I called him the "Lou Thesz of midgets." One reason for that was, it didn't matter how big a person was. He'd fight them in a heartbeat. He was a tough, little son-of-a-bitch. The other reason was because he always wore a suit and tie to the matches, which was something Thesz did.

One time, we were staying in Quebec with the Baillargeon brothers. Sky Low Low wanted to buy some new clothes, so I offered to take him shopping. He walked into a store that sold children's clothes. It was so weird to see a man buy children's clothes, but it was something he had to do.

The midgets in those days were great performers. In my opinion, they could out-bump most of the guys in the business, and they beat the hell out of each other. Little Beaver [Lionel Giroux] would chop the hell out of Fuzzy Cupid [Leon Stap]. Fuzzy would come back to the dressing room with red welts all over his chest. I saw Little Beaver throw Fuzzy across the ring one night. Fuzzy landed on his butt and bounced all the way across the ring. Boom, boom, boom, boom, boom.

When I was wrestling in Montreal, I always got stuck hauling them to the towns. Fuzzy Cupid used to drive me crazy. He had a harmonica. He'd play that thing all the time. It would have been okay if he could play it well, but he couldn't play worth a shit.

Fuzzy, Beaver, Sky Low Low and Brown Panther [Bobo Johnson] rode with me one night. Fuzzy just wouldn't stop playing that harmonica. When we

were about halfway home, I pulled to the side of the road. "Shit. I think we have a flat tire." I got out and looked, and then said, "Yeah, I’m gonna have to change it." I went to the back of the car, opened the trunk lid, and called out, "Hey, Fuzzy. Come here a minute. I need your help."

The tire was way up in the nose of the trunk. I could have reached it easily, but I didn’t want Fuzzy to know that. I said, "I can’t get in there far enough to pull out the tire."

Those midgets can get into anything, so he leaned over and shimmied into the trunk. When he was most of the way in, I pushed him in and shut the trunk lid. The other midgets had gotten out of the car by that time. I wondered whether or not they’d gang up on me to free their friend, but they started to giggle when they saw what I had done. They were laughing and Fuzzy was yelling, "Let me out of here!"

I looked at the others and said, "That’ll shut his ass up."

We pulled out onto the road and continued our trip home. Of course, as you’ve probably already guessed, there had been nothing wrong with the tire all along. Fuzzy, meanwhile, was raising all kinds of hell. Hoping to drown him out, I turned up the radio full volume. It didn’t help. That son-of-a-bitch drove me crazy with his ranting and raving. I finally stopped and let him out. He didn’t bother me half as much when he was in the car as he did when I had him in the trunk.

One night, one of my partners and I were on a card with the midgets. They always got so excited just before it was time for them to go out and wrestle. I don’t know if it was adrenalin, or if they just worked themselves up so they were ready to entertain the audience, but they were pumped. We were wrestling in a building that had a small workshop in a room adjacent to the dressing room. We poked around in there and found a tall ladder, a hammer, and nails. We nailed their clothes to the ceiling and then hid the ladder. We had already wrestled, so we left. I don’t know how they got their clothes down, but I wish I could have been a fly on the wall of that dressing room.

Like most of the boys, Ray Stevens loved to pull ribs. He had a friend who owned a horse. Ray was a good rider and he liked to ride now and then.

One day, he invited me to go along. What he didn’t tell me was that the horse was skittish and would buck a rider off whenever it was given the opportunity. When we got there, he stood by the horse and said, "Come on. Try it."

I hesitated because I wasn’t much of a rider, but when he persisted, I agreed to give it a shot. He helped me up onto the back of the horse. The second my ass cheeks settled down onto the back of that horse, he reared up on his hind legs and sent me ass over teakettle. I fell straight down and landed on the back of my neck. As I rolled over and tried to get my knees up under me, I heard Ray yell, "Watch out!"

The horse kicked backwards and its hooves landed solidly on the side of my ribcage. I went sailing through the air and landed about six feet away from the launching pad. "Oh, god! I’m dying," was all I could manage to say.

Ray asked me over and over, "You alright? You alright?"

I wanted to scream, "NO! I’M NOT ALL RIGHT, YOU DUMB BASTARD!" However, all I could manage to do was softly repeat what I had said before. "Oh, god! I’m dying."

Ray and his girlfriend (okay, yes, he was still married) helped me get into the car and they took me to the hospital. The emergency personnel put me on a gurney, took me inside, and left me lying there in a hallway. All of a sudden, I felt the cart moving. Ray had given the cart a subtle push towards a section of the hallway where the flooring had a slight slope to it. The cart hit the slope and took off, slamming into things as it rolled. Boom. "Oohhh." Boom. "Oohhh." Boom. "Oohhh." That cart spun around twice and only stopped when it hit a wall.

I really was in a lot of pain. The doctors rushed me to the x-ray room and, after a short examination, told me I had been very close to having a punctured lung. Ray didn’t know it when he sent me on that thrill ride, but he could have killed me … and he was laughing the whole time. The only thought that went through my mind was, "I’m gonna kill that son-of-a-bitch."

Another time, I was driving home from a match with a couple of the other guys that had been on the card. Now, Ray had driven stock cars, so he was a really good driver. I was driving at least 65 miles an hour when, unbeknownst to me, he drove up behind me. He didn't hit me. He simply eased up onto my bumper until they touched, and I never felt a thing. It was pitch dark behind me, as well, so I couldn't see anything. The next thing I knew, I was going 70, and then 80, and then 90 miles an hour. I was sitting on those brakes, but I couldn't push them down too hard because it would have sent us into a spin. I was so scared because we were coming up on some hard curves. The guys with me were all hanging on to whatever they could lay their hands. All of a sudden, the pressure eased up. As I looked in my outside mirror, I saw Ray driving up alongside me. He looked over at me, grinned, and took off like a bat out of hell. I did some crazy things in my time, but I wasn't in Ray's league in any way, shape, form, or fashion.

We pulled a lot of ribs together, too. One time, while we were staying at a hotel in Florida, we saw a guy across the street sitting on a flagpole. Young people today have no idea what I'm talking about, but in the early 1900s, pole-sitting was a fad used primarily as a publicity stunt. He had been up there for days and was the most talked-about news item in the South. Ray and I bought four dozen eggs and went up onto the roof of our hotel, which stood high above the flagpole. We threw every one of those eggs at that guy.

Ray and I were a team for 16 months, during which time we wrestled a lot of talented wrestlers — Buddy Rogers and the Great Scott, Buddy Rogers and Billy Darnell, Frankie Talaber and Bobby Bruns, Mark and Donn Lewin, and Ernie and Emil Dusek. In October 1956, Cowboy Luttrall brought Ray back into Florida. Ray spent the next three years wrestling in just three territories — Charlotte, Tennessee, and Alabama — and he made a good living. When Ray left, I either wrestled in singles matches or I teamed up with a variety of partners. I wouldn't see Ray again for a year. When I did, I was wrestling under another name and with another partner.

For a short time while I was in Columbus, I ran a gym. The former owner decided it was more trouble than it was worth and told me he'd let me see what I could do with it before he just gave it up. I loved to work out, so I told him I'd run the place. We cleaned it up, painted the walls, and made it

look decent. We didn’t have the fancy equipment they have today. We just had weights and benches.

We had a few people sign up to train with us, but none of the wrestlers came to the gym. Not one. They just sat around in front of the wrestling office and drank beer. We charged something like a buck a workout. We got some good publicity because the newspaper people found out about it and came down to take pictures of me lifting weights. They printed a few stories in the newspaper, calling it "Kalt’s Gym," and gave me some good publicity.

One of the guys who helped me was a youngster named Bobby Davis. Bobby was what we called a "hang-around." He was only 16 years old and he loved the wrestling business, so he hung around the wrestling office. Bobby and I spent a lot of time together. I liked the kid and he liked me because I reminded him of Buddy Rogers. He loved Buddy Rogers and Hank Williams. In fact, he told me he cried when Hank Williams died in 1953. He also fixed me up with good-looking women.

One day, when we were in the gym listening to Elvis Presley songs play on the radio, he said, "You know what we need to do, Don?"

I said, "What?"

He said, "We need to call that mother fucker."

He was talking about Elvis. I didn’t say it out loud because I didn’t want to make the kid feel bad, but I thought, "Fat chance in hell."

Bobby must have made close to a hundred phone calls, trying to find a way to talk with Elvis. Believe it or not, he finally bullshitted someone into giving him the phone number. He made the call and the person on the other end of the line said, "I’m sorry, but he just left." I’ll never forget how he did something I thought was impossible.

Bobby put 100 percent into everything he did. I used to marvel at how smart he was. In fact, I used to refer to him as "The Brain," and that was

many years before Bobby "The Brain" Heenan ever thought about getting into wrestling.

I usually opened the gym around ten in the morning and hung around until it was time to go on the road. Bobby would show up and take over for a few hours until it was time to close. We didn't keep the gym for too long, but we enjoyed it while we had it.

By late 1956, I had pretty much worn out my welcome in the Columbus territory. I wanted to go to New York because I had heard big things were going on there. Ray and I had wrestled in New York a few times in 1955 and 1956 when Buddy Rogers took us there, but I didn't know how to go about getting myself booked. When I asked Al Haft if he could help me, all he did was give me an address.

I didn't have a gimmick, so I knew I had to do something. Bobby wanted to be a wrestler, but he injured his neck while he was training at Al Haft's, so he asked me what I thought about him becoming a manager. That's when I came up with the idea to do something different.

We talked about ideas and I told him my thoughts on what a manager should do and how he should dress. I always dressed up in those days. In fact, most people dressed up in those days when they went out. The wrestlers did, too, so we looked normal, but Bobby and I decided to outclass everybody with our style of clothes. I also wore a zoot suit, which had full-legged, tight-cuffed trousers, and a long coat with wide lapels and wide padded shoulders. Buddy Rogers had given me a brand new pink suit, so I went out and bought suits in other colors, like orange and green. Years later, I gave that pink suit to Len Rossi [Len Rositano].

My next step was to talk to Bobby's parents. He was under age, so I had to get their permission to take him with me. His dad was totally against the idea. I did everything I could to convince Bobby's dad that it was something that would benefit Bobby, but nothing I said would change his mind. Bobby and I went out, rented a white tuxedo, and had a picture made of him wearing it and holding a walking cane. When I showed the photo to his dad, he said, "I can't believe how professional my son looks." He said if I would promise to take care of Bobby, he'd let him go.

The next day, I had a stack of photos printed and I sent them to Toots Mondt [Joseph Mondt], the promoter in New York. When Toots saw them, he flipped. He loved the idea. He sent a telegram that said he'd love to have us work with him and gave us a starting date.

A manager was something different at that time. The only thing close to a "manager" in those days was a valet, like the people who accompanied Gorgeous George, Count Pietro Rossi [nee Peter Rosania], Lord Blears [James Blears], or Lord Leslie Carlton [Leo Wippern] to the ring. The Elephant Boy [Tony Olivas] was accompanied to the ring by a "slave girl" named Moolah [Lillian Ellison]. For the most part, their role was simply to accompany a wrestler to the ring and take care of their ring attire. My idea was different. I wanted someone to be at ringside while I wrestled, and to occasionally divert the referee's attention from something I shouldn't be doing. I didn't want him doing it too often, but just enough to get a little more heat for doing something I'd normally be doing.

One month before we left for New York, Bobby's original dream of being a wrestler came true when Al Haft booked the two of us in a couple of tag team matches against Chief Don Eagle and Billy Two Rivers.

A few weeks after that, we packed our bags and headed for the Big Apple.

Chapter 7
Muscle Relaxer

Neither Don Kalt nor Don Stevens made it to New York. Instead, a dapper young man named Don Juan the Magnificent showed up in Toots Mondt's office on December 24, 1956. At least, that's what my publicity photos said. It was a good gimmick. I wasn't doing the Gorgeous George gimmick, or copying Buddy Rogers. What I was doing was something in between the two. I would do Buddy's strut and act cocky, but not to the extent he did.

The pictures I sent Toots Mondt had "Don Juan the Magnificent" printed on the bottom, so I assumed I'd be using that name. Toots had other ideas because he thought "Don Juan" sounded too carny. He told me he wanted me to continue to use the name Don Stevens.

Bobby Davis was the icing on the cake. Everywhere we went, he wore either a white or black tuxedo, a homburg [hat], and carried a cane. When he walked into the arena, the brashness of his strut rivaled that of Buddy Rogers. He didn't have to do anything other than walk … and the people wanted to kill him. They would shout all kinds of derogatory comments at him. "You arrogant son-of-a-bitch!" was one of the milder things people yelled.

If there ever was a person born for the part of the wrestling manager, it was Bobby Davis. He'd bend the wrist that held his cane in such an effeminate manner, place the tip of the cane on the ground, and look out at the people with contempt showing on his face. I'll never forget the first night we went to the ring. A young boy was standing in the aisle. Bobby's lips curled in a sneer and he said, "Get back, you little brat."

I thought, "Where did Bobby get the idea to do that?" There were no managers at the time. At least, none that took an active role in the process of getting heat. He was simply winging it as he went along. He was a

natural-born performer who knew exactly what to do to make the public hate him.

Of course, I was walking right behind him, and I acted with just as much arrogance. I'd stop in the aisle, brush back my hair with the back of my hand, and look out over the crowd with disdain. Men with long hair were a novelty at the time. People hated men with long hair, and for a man to have long blond hair riled them up even more. All of that, combined with an earring (yes, I had an earring back then), was almost more than those people could stand.

At the same time, a wrestler named Wildman Fargo was making his bones in the territory. It turned out to be Jackie Fargo, who I had met and wrestled in Florida in 1953. Jackie was from China Grove, North Carolina, and he got into the business through Johnny Long and Fabulous Moolah, who were running opposition to Jim Crockett in the Carolinas. His first ring name was Honeyboy Fargo, but he changed it to Dick Bishop for a few matches before settling on the name Jackie Fargo.

Jackie was a good wrestler when I first met him in Florida, but when I saw him in New York, he had become one hell of a performer.

One month after I came into the territory, Toots Mondt began booking us together as a tag team. As far as my editor is able to determine, Jackie and I teamed up for the first time on January 14, 1957 on a card at Fournier Memorial Hall in Wilmington, Delaware. We wrestled two preliminary boys named Virgil Randolph and Jerry Gordet. Prior to that, Jackie was wrestling as "Wildman Fargo," while I was billed as Don Stevens. When Toots put us together, they began to call me "Wildman Stevens." Over the next three weeks, as a team, we wrestled in Wilmington several times, as well as Baltimore, Washington D.C., and Reading.

The problem was, Jackie and I didn't get along from the first time we laid eyes on each other. We were both trying to get over. We both had long blond hair. We both had cocky personalities. We were so much alike that we couldn't get along, and the personal problems between us spilled over into the ring. He tried to top whatever I did in the ring. I'd try to outdo

everything he did. We were always one-upping each other. Several times, we had arguments in the dressing room.

Word of the problems we were having eventually reached the ears of Toots Mondt. He knew we weren't getting along, so he called us into the office. The New York wrestling office was on a side street off Times Square. There was a barbershop near the office where the mob had bumped off one of the gangsters while he was getting a shave. Toots usually had a cigar hanging out of his mouth. He leaned over his desk and said, "What's the problem between the two of you?"

Jackie said, "We ain't got no problem."

"Yeah, you do. You're always fightin' each other." I'll never forget what Toots said next. "You two are actin' like a couple'a broads. You look like broads, too, with that long, blond hair. That's okay because the people pay money to see you looking like that. The problem is, this bullshit between the two of you is bad for business. You should be working together so we can do more business."

"How can we do that?" I asked.

"Tomorrow, I want you to go out and get a couple belts made. You're gonna be the champions."

"What should we put on the belts? New York champions?"

"No, dumbass. You're gonna be world tag team champions."

The next morning, we went to a jeweler and paid $100 to have the belts made.

On January 29, 1957, we were billed as the world tag team champions for the first time, although we didn't have the belts until the following month. On February 4, we were booked to appear in New York City's famous Madison Square Garden. It was a night I'll never forget because I had always heard so much about the Garden. We didn't wrestle as a team. Jack

wrestled Lou Klein, while I faced Jackie Nichols [Samuel Nichols], a wrestler I knew from Columbus.

Before I move on, I want to tell a story about an incident that took place that night. One of the real characters of the wrestling business in New York at the time was Skull Murphy [John Murphy]. Skull was a big guy who had a face that scared everyone, and as a child, he contracted a disease that left his entire body hairless. The combination of his bald head and sinister looks made him the perfect monster heel.

Skull ran into more trouble than he expected when the promoter told him he wanted him to do a job [lose a match] to Ricki Starr [Bernard Herman]. Starr was a slender, handsome man who would go into the ring wearing ballet slippers and do ballet moves to confuse and defeat his opponents. In the heat of battle, he would do a pirouette and then hit his opponent with a judo kick or dropkick. What most people didn't realize was that, behind the almost effeminate mannerisms, Ricki was a very good wrestler who competed in the AAU national championships during high school.

Skull weighed at least 230 pounds, while Ricki weighed somewhere in the 180 to 185 range, so Skull didn't want to do what he was asked to do. "You tell that son-of-a-bitch to get his best damn hold and we'll see who wins this match." That was a mistake. Word got back to Ricki and he made Skull look like a fool in the ring, pinning him cleanly in front of several thousand people.

On March 11, we made our first appearance in the Garden as a team, wrestling Miguel Pérez and Reyes Rodriguez [who would later make a name for himself in wrestling as Ciclon Negro]. That was the night we took the belts to the ring for the first time.

I always let Jackie make all the business decisions. I respected Jackie. He was the leader. In later years, after I changed my name to Don Fargo, the advertisements always read "Jackie and Don Fargo," rather than the other way around. That didn't bother me. I was just happy to be part of the team. He was the smart one. I can't read. I can't write. I don't even know the alphabet. I'm not interested in it. I let Jackie take care of all our business.

I had a lot of tag team partners, but Jackie was the one who I always looked up to as my real brother. Other than Buddy Rogers, he was the only person I ever let control my career. I had charisma, the talk, and the ring ability. Jackie had all those attributes and business sense. I didn't want to worry about money. I didn't want to call promoters to get bookings. Jackie did all that. He always called me Dan. "I'll take care of everything, Dan. Let me handle it. I'll get you the money." And he did. When we lived together, I'd see him leaving his trailer. "Where you going, Jake?"

"I'm going to the office to take care of that payoff we got the other night."

I liked that. I didn't have to be bothered with the details. He was smart with money and he knew what he was doing. I didn't.

Before I met Jackie, I always let Bobby Davis lead me down the aisle. Jackie didn't like that. He thought we should walk out first so we were the center of attention, and not Bobby. I didn't think that was right because Bobby was our valet. I thought he should lead us to the ring. I didn't want to argue with Jackie, so I went along with what he said. Bobby's appearance clicked, anyway. He walked behind us, waving his cane and doing crazy things, and got as much attention from the crowd as we did.

The one thing I always did, however, was to make sure Bobby was taken care of. When he was with me, I made sure he got the same payoff I did because, without him, I wouldn't have been anything.

For the first few years of my wrestling career, I was announced as being from Pittsburgh. I don't remember who came up with the idea to change it, but Jackie and I told everyone we were from Hell's Kitchen, New York. Of course, Hell's Kitchen, "Noo Yawk" was the way we pronounced it.

What a name! I couldn't think of any better place from which to be known. I had heard people talk about the Manhattan neighborhood. At one time, due to the influence and control by gangs and organized crime, Hell's Kitchen was known as "the most dangerous area on the American continent." I had heard movie stars, gangsters, and even businessmen talk about growing up in Hell's Kitchen. What better place could we have picked?

Jackie was from the South, but we both began to talk like we were from New York. At least, it was what we thought would be a New York accent. We based our speech on what we had heard in the movies. "Hey, Jack! Where'd ya leave thu cah?"

"It's back in Hell's Kitchen, Noo Yawk on Thutty-Thud and Fourth Street."

Jackie and I also copied Buddy Rogers manner of talking. We talked out of the side of our mouths and said "Pally" all the time. That was Jackie's favorite expression. "Hey, Pally!"

I had never cut a promo before I went to New York. I really didn't know what to say. That was one of the reasons why Bobby Davis was such an asset to me. He was a talker, so I thought he might be able to help me. Jackie, however, didn't want Bobby to say a word on camera. I believe Jackie made a good call because Bobby really didn't know enough at the time, but later on, he became a great mouthpiece for the guys he managed.

Jackie didn't have much experience doing promos, either, but he jumped on them like an old pro. For awhile, I stumbled around, but I eventually caught on. Once I did, I loved to do promos. All a promoter had to do was give me the match, day, and place, and I'd run with it.

During February and March, Toots gave us a huge push in all the major arenas: the Baltimore Coliseum, Eastern Parkway Arena and St. Nicks Arena in New York City, Capitol Arena in Washington DC, and Madison Square Garden. We wrestled all the top guys, including Jackie Nichols and Arnold Skaaland, Karl von Hess [Frank Faketty] and Skull Murphy, Antonino Rocca and Miguel Pérez, and Dr. Jerry Graham and Dick the Bruiser. The push was to prepare us to defend the title in the Garden on March 30 against Rocca and Pérez.

Kola Kwariani was the booker. He loved to play poker. We played poker all the time there in the office, but I played poker with him just one time. His game was straight poker with nothing wild. We had more than $1,000 in the pot and I bluffed him. When he realized what I had done, he got really mad. "You bluff? You do not bluff Koola, you son-of-a-beetch." He threatened to throw me out the window. I never played poker with him again.

Kola used to eat at an Italian restaurant across the street from the wrestling office. Jackie and I saw him in there one day and went in to talk to him. We didn't know he took grave offense to anyone talking to him while he ate. "You don't talk to Koola while he eats. If you bother Koola when he eats, I keel you."

The first time we worked with Rocca and Pérez was at St. Nick's Arena in New York City. Jackie and I were sitting in the dressing room when Kola walked in. He was Rocca's spokesman during that time. He said, "You are going to wrestle Rocco … Antonino Rocco. Rocco is the greatest wrestler in the world. He is like a bool. He attack you like a bool. He dropkick you. He head scissor you. Rocco ees bool strong." He told us we were going to do this, and going to do that, but we couldn't do this. Rocco this. Rocco that. "Rocco strong like bool."

I never understood why Kola was Rocca's spokesman. His accent was so thick, I couldn't understand half of what he was saying. I looked at Jackie and said, "What the fuck did he say?"

Jackie said, "I don't fucking know, but we better do it."

Kola said, "Wassa matta. You no unnerstan' Englis'?"

The upshot was that Kola wanted us to make Rocca look good.

I didn't have a problem putting Rocca over because he really impressed me. I had a really good build, but Rocca was muscular and had a much bigger body frame. He had his own style, one that nobody could copy. That's not to say there weren't people who tried. One wrestler who looked a lot like Rocca, and tried to wrestle like him, was Manuel Chaij, who wrestled as the Amazing Zuma. He was a good copy, but he couldn't come close to matching the original. As the old saying goes, people like Rocca, Buddy Rogers and Gorgeous George could be imitated, but never duplicated. That's so true. Many people tried to copy them, but most of them failed in the attempt.

During the week before our match with Rocca and Pérez in the Garden, we did a promo on TV. Jackie didn't warn me about what he was going to do,

but he said the dumbest thing I had ever heard in my life. "If we don’t beat Rocca and Pérez in the Garden next week, we’ll take off our tights and burn them in the middle of the ring." That sounds corny today, but back then, the people loved it.

On the night of the match, we dressed in our finest suits and took a cab from the King Edward Hotel to the Garden. When we pulled up in front of the Garden, we saw a marquee that said something like, "Tonight! Wildman Fargo and Wildman Stevens!" Seeing that sent chills up my spine.

We knew there was going to be a lot of people there that night, but we didn’t expect to see so many people lined up outside the Garden. Tickets for the Saturday night card had sold out by Wednesday and scalpers were selling five-dollar ringside tickets for as much as $15. Standing room was sold at show time, but the police on horseback were telling the people waiting outside that everything was sold out. When we got out of the cab, we had to walk through the crowd. To be honest, I was a little scared. A day or two before the match, Jackie said, "Let’s get some pictures made. We can sell them."

What a great idea. I was all for it. Jackie went to a printer and had postcard-size pictures made. I didn’t know how much they cost or how many he had printed. On the night of the match, Jackie gave a handful of the pictures to a little kid and told him to sell them for us. To tell the truth, I didn’t think we’d ever see the pictures or the kid again, but he came back less than ten minutes later asking for more. Jackie would only give him so many at a time, but in less than 30 minutes, that kid had sold every picture at a dollar apiece. I asked Jackie, "How many did you have printed?"

"Two hundred."

"What? They expect more than twenty-two thousand people here tonight and you only had two hundred pictures made?"

I couldn’t believe it. We could have sold thousands of pictures, but Jackie was so cheap that he didn’t want to pay for more. I chewed his ass over that, and up until the time of his death, I reminded him of that every time I saw him.

It was such a thrill to walk out into the Garden that night. We had been in the Garden before, but this time, we were in the main event. Jackie, Bobby Davis and I walked down the aisle to the tune of 20,000 people screaming and hollering at us. We were wearing our sequined outfits, so when the spotlights flashed over us, the sequins would glitter like raindrops in the sunshine.

Jackie exaggerated the Buddy Rogers strut, but I did it exactly like Buddy did. In fact, I copied a lot of Buddy's actions and mannerisms. Night after night, I would sit and study everything he did. I finally asked him if he minded me using the strut. "Don, you're welcome to take it and call it your own. If you had taken it upon yourself to use it, I would have come down on you, but you had the courtesy to ask for permission, so I'd love to have you use it."

After we split the first two falls with Rocca and Pérez, Jackie and I dropped the third. When we lost the match, the people in the Garden began to scream, "Burn your tights! Burn your tights!"

With all the excitement, I had forgotten all about Jackie's promise. I yelled to the people at ringside, "I got nothin' on underneath 'em."

I heard someone shout, "We don't give a fuck! Take 'em off and burn 'em."

The people then did something I never expected. People from every corner of ringside threw matchbooks at the ring. We were bombarded with them. We could have built a house with the match books that hit that ring. I had never seen that many books of matches in one place at one time. The ring was literally full of match books.

"Burn your tights!"

The 20,125 people paid $63,000 to see our match with Rocca and Pérez. Our payoff for that night was $3,500 each. We were on our way.

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Long Island NY Star-Journal, Monday, April 1, 1957

PRO WRESTLING: 20,125 AT GARDEN
by Jack E. Lee
Argue all you want about whether or not professional wrestling is a sport. The fact remains that it's the hottest attraction Madison Square Garden has housed all winter.
Saturday night's show attracted 20,125 grunt and groan addicts, including 700 standees. It was the best Garden crowd of the year. In comparison, Saturday afternoon's East-West basketball game drew 13.448; yesterday's Globetrotter contest 15,563.
The three Garden mat shows this year have played to more than 58,000 persons, and another full house is in prospect on Monday, May 13, when the pros appear next.
Antonino Rocca and Miguel Pérez took two of three falls from WILDMAN JACK FARGO and DON STEVENS in Saturday's featured tag match. Ricki Starr beat Paul Bunyan, 8-[foot]-2 newcomer, in 3:55; Dick Afflis won by disqualification over Karl Von Hess; Chief Big Heart decisioned Skull Murphy; Gino Garibaldi decisioned Cowboy Rocky Lee; Oyama Kato subdued Jackie Wilson; and Reyes Rodriguez pinned Harry Lewis of Forest Hills.

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After we got our money for the Garden show, we each took $500 and cashed it in for one-dollar and five-dollar bills. We went back to our hotel room, which was on the 23rd floor, and celebrated our big night with champagne. We were in a partying mood. We bounced and did flips on the beds.

New York City streets are busy all the time; no matter what time of day or night it is. In those days, the big hotels had huge windows that could be opened because they didn't have air conditioning. We opened the window and threw out the $1,000 worth of ones and fives. The people on the streets below were running around trying to catch the money as it floated down towards them. They ran out into the street in front of the moving streetcars without giving their safety a second's thought.

I hate to admit it, but money didn't mean anything to me. As fast as I made money, I spent it just as quickly. Cash would disappear from my fingers like

water. So many times, I would spend every last cent within hours of getting paid, and I would have to go to the wrestling office to get an advance on my next payday. We were making thousands of dollars in New York. Toots Mondt asked me one time, "What are you doing with all that money?"

I just laughed and said, "Spending it!"

In those days, we got paid every night … and by the following night, we would be broke again. We didn't care because we knew we'd get paid again the next night. If we worked Madison Square Garden, we knew we were going to get anywhere from $1,000 to $3,000. The next night, we'd work White Plains and make $500. The payoff in Newark was $300 to $400. That was a lot of money in those days, but even so, I'd be so broke at the end of the week that I had to get a draw [loan] from the wrestling office.

One of the first things I did after the Garden show was buy a pink Cadillac convertible. I paid $2,400 cash for it.

Jackie, on the other hand, was the opposite of me. He saved every bit of money he could. You couldn't pinch a dime from him. I can say this now that he's dead. When we ate in restaurants, I always let him leave the table first because he would pick up the tip I left as soon as my back was turned.

For the next 30 days, Jackie and I continued to wrestle in the territory. During that time, Toots asked me to make a trip to West Virginia and work a couple of shows there for Ace Freeman [Zoltan Friedman]. Ace was the promoter in West Virginia, and Billy Fox was the booker, but Toots owned a piece of the action. He wanted me to go down to rile things up a bit and give the territory a much-needed kick in the pants.

Actually, to call Ace Freeman's promotion a "professional wrestling territory" is stretching it a bit. Ace ran a second-rate promotion and used a lot of guys who had already seen the better part of their careers and couldn't find work anywhere else. There didn't seem to be much "professional" about it, either. I had never seen anything like it, especially coming out of New York where everything was done in a first-class manner.

Jackie got along well with Bobby Davis, but when I returned to New York, Bobby wasn’t around. When I asked Jackie if he had seen him, he said, "I let him go." I couldn’t believe it. Bobby was smart, though. He didn’t need the Fargos. He had the talent to go places without us. I don’t think Bobby ever looked back. He called me shortly after I got back from West Virginia and said, "Nothing against you, Donnie, but I’m gonna manage these other guys." A short time later, he was managing Buddy Rogers and making nothing but money. In the years that followed, he managed many of the top names who came into New York: Dr. Jerry and Eddie Graham, Magnificent Maurice [Eugene DuBuque], Johnny Barend, and Johnny Valentine. People talk about Bobby to this day and some consider him to be the best manager ever.

I talked to Bobby a few times in the years that followed. In fact, when I was wrestling in the Los Angeles territory in 1976, he showed up for one of my matches. He looked really good. We talked for a long time. When I asked him what he was doing, he said he was working for Merle Haggard, setting up hamburger franchises.

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Editor's note: An interesting side-note to that story is that Haggard took advice from a friend and sold the 25 hamburger franchises he owned for the $265,000 he had originally paid for them. The franchise was Wendy’s.

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That was the last time I heard from Bobby until, many years later, I got his number from someone and gave him a call. He told me he had a disease and didn’t have long to live. I told him to not give up hope. That was the last time I talked to him.

Jackie and I did some of the craziest things. We pushed the envelope far more than Ray Stevens and I ever did. For instance, we didn’t wear clothes when we made trips to the towns. We made every trip buck naked, drank beer, and carried on like a couple of lunatics. Whenever somebody would pass us, we’d stick our bare asses out the window and moon them.

One day, I got on my knees on the car seat and pointed my ass towards Jackie. While he was still driving, he drew a big pair of eyes on my ass cheeks. Jackie’s mission was to see how many cars he could pass so we could show off his artwork. Just before we passed someone, I’d stick a lit cigar up my ass and hang my ass out the window. The people saw two big eyeballs staring at them and a "mouth" smoking a cigar.

Another time, Bobby Davis wanted to get in on the action, so he took off his clothes in the back seat. When we rolled into the next town, we had to stop at a red light. Cars were all around us and going through the intersection. Bobby jumped out of the car wearing nothing more than his white socks. He ran around the car and screamed like a lunatic. Just as he rounded the back end of the car towards the door he had left open, the light changed. Jackie took off with a squeal of tires and left poor Bobby standing in the middle of the intersection. When I turned around, I saw Bobby running around parked cars, trying to find a place to hide. I told Jackie, "Circle back, man. We can’t just leave him."

We went back, but we couldn’t find him. We drove around and around the block. When we were back on the street where we left him, I saw him. He was hunkered down in the back of a parked car, looking out the window. It made me think of the old "Kilroy was here" drawing that was so popular years ago. We pulled up alongside the car and I yelled, "Come on! Quick! Get in!" He got out of the car, jumped into the back seat, and we took off.

That was a good example of why you should never trust a wrestler, because they’ll take advantage of any opportunity to play a rib. Ray was the worst. If we were on a trip and I had to piss, I’d hold it until we got to a place where I didn’t have to worry about him leaving me. There was a good reason for that. I wasn’t about to be left on the side of the road. Shortly after we met, we went to a town together and I said, "Hey, I’ve gotta go to the bathroom, Ray."

"Okay, I’ll pull over."

I asked him, "Do you gotta go?"

"No."

The second I took it out, he took off. He didn’t come back to get me, either, but he knew the other boys were behind us, so he knew I’d get a ride home. It happened twice before I learned my lesson. The first time I did it, I was sober. The second time, I was drunk. After that, it didn’t matter how drunk I was. I knew better than to get out of Ray’s car.

It did happen one other time, though, when I made a trip with Ray and one of the girl wrestlers. We had the radio going full blast and we were having a good time. I was in the front with Ray and she was in the back. We wanted to get some sun, so she took off everything but her panties and bra. I’ll let you guess what I was wearing. Halfway through the trip, I had to take a leak, so Ray pulled off the road. When I got out, she said, "I have to go, too." She squatted beside the car and let it go. I knew better than to get out of the car when Ray was driving, but I didn’t think he’d do it since she was with us. He didn’t care, though. About ten seconds after she crouched down, Ray took off, leaving us totally exposed to the world. We both jumped down into the ditch and onto our stomachs so the people who drove by wouldn’t see us. He turned around and came back a minute or two later, which is more than he would have done if I had been the only one with him.

Another time, Jackie and I were on the turnpike in his Cadillac convertible on our way back to New York. Jackie and I were in the front seat with a case of beer between us and Bobby Davis was in the back. All three of us were naked. Bobby was stretched out on the seat, working on his tan, while Jackie and I were enjoying the wind in our faces and letting our blond hair blow into the air behind us. All of a sudden, a car full of sailors came up beside us in the left lane. They had seen our blond hair and began ragging on us. "He-eeeey, baby! He-eeeey, baby! Hey, you blond bastards."

Before we could respond, Bobby sits up and pitches a beer bottle at them. It hit the side of their car. "Oh, god," I said. "Jack, get us the hell out of here."

Jackie pushed down on the accelerator and moved over in front of them. They stayed right on our bumper. Bobby and I both threw beer bottles at them. We could hear them cursing us. We also saw cars behind us stopping and pulling off the road when they ran over the bottles. When we ran out of beer bottles, I told Jackie, "We’re out of ammo. Get us out of here." He floored that Cadillac and left them in the dust. Fortunately, those were the

days before people had cell phones, or CB radios, for that matter. Nobody could call the police and report us.

Perhaps the funniest rib we pulled was also the one that got us into the most trouble. Jackie and I were staying on one of the top floors of the King Edward Hotel in New York City. We had been told that Vince McMahon Sr. was going to hold a big party after the Garden show for businessmen he knew. They were having it in a room two floors down from the roof.

Ricki Starr, Jackie, a couple of other guys, and I went up to the roof quite often to drink champagne and cut up. On that night, we took the fire rope from where it was being stored in the stairwell and took it up onto the roof. After we located McMahon's room, we leaned over the edge of the roof above it. We could hear voices and laughter coming from the doorway which led out onto his balcony. While Jackie made a harness from the rope, I took off all my clothes. He looped the rope underneath my arms and tied the other end to a vent pipe. Ricki handed me a bottle of champagne and I sat down on the edge of the roof with my feet dangling over the side. They slowly lowered me down towards McMahon's balcony. When I was low enough to touch the balcony railing with my feet, I raised the bottle into the air, looked through the doorway into the room, and started to shout something … but I couldn't get a word out. In the room, with McMahon and the businessmen, were the wives … and they were all standing there, frozen in place and looking at me, with their mouths open and a look of disbelief on their faces.

"PULL ME UP! PULL ME UP!"

Needless to say, McMahon called us to the office the next day and gave us hell.

One of my favorite stories had to do with an embarrassing situation I got myself into. I wanted to do something that would really make the boys laugh. I told them to be at my room at a certain time because I had some entertainment planned. I brought a girl back to the room and, after taking off all her clothes, I threw her onto the bed and started messing around with her. Ricki Starr and several others were sitting in chairs and drinking beer.

When I had the girl sufficiently worked up, I turned to the guys in the room and said, "Hey, guys. Watch this." I pushed my index finger into the girl's vagina and said, "One." I pulled it out, held two fingers in the air, said, "Two," and then put two fingers in. I turned and grinned at Ricky and said, "Should I go for three?"

They all laughed, so … I put three fingers in. They cheered me on and began to chant, "Four, four, four, four!"

So … I put four fingers in. Then Ricki upped the ante. "I bet you can't get your whole hand in there."

Now, if you want me to do something, the easiest way to get me to do it is to tell me not to do it, or that I can't do it. I went over to my wrestling bag, pulled out a bottle of baby oil I carried with me, and put it all over my hand. I walked back over to the girl and, without any hesitation, slid it in. I felt resistance for a couple of seconds, but all of a sudden … bloop! My hand was in. Everybody cheered and I turned my head around to give them a big smile of victory.

All of a sudden, the pressure around my wrist increased. It felt like my hand was locked in a vice. I gave a gentle tug, but it wouldn't budge. I couldn't get it out. I said, "Oh, shit." From the panicked look on my face, the boys knew something was wrong. When I said, "My hand is stuck fast," the boys started laughing like crazy.

In those days, there wasn't such a thing as 911. If we had an emergency, we had to call the hospital and they would send an ambulance. I don't remember what we told them when we called, but the only thing I could think about was whether or not I'd be going to jail. I didn't think what I had done was illegal, but things were a lot different in the '50s than they are today. In those days, Ricky and Lucy Ricardo still slept in separate beds. When the medical personnel arrived, they put the girl on a gurney and covered her (and my hand/arm) with a sheet. Our predicament didn't seem to faze them. They must have seen just about everything there was to see because they took it all in stride. They told me, "Just make it look like you're pushing the gurney."

We got into the elevator and started down. There was no TV in the rooms at the time, so there were a lot of people in the lobby … sitting around talking, reading newspapers. As soon as the elevator doors opened fully, Ricki Starr pulled the sheet off … and took off with it. The medical techs and I started running like hell, pushing that gurney as fast as it would go. They loaded us into the ambulance and off we went.

They had a sheet or blanket in the ambulance, so they covered us up before we reached the hospital. They took us to a room and, after a short wait, a doctor came in. I don't know if he had seen anything like it before, but he seemed to know exactly what to do. He gave the girl a shot of muscle relaxer. Less than a minute later, I felt the pressure begin to ease, and my hand slipped right out.

I had forgotten all about that story until my editor brought it up. He heard it from Stan Hansen, who, in turn, had heard the story years before from some of the boys. Stan said he wasn't quite sure whether or not to believe it when the boys told him the story. One day, when he walked into the dressing room in one of the Amarillo towns, Ricki Starr was there. Stan walked over to Ricki and said, "I have to ask you about a story I heard about Don Fargo."

Before he could say another word, Ricki said, "About the time he got his hand stuck in a girl's pussy?"

Stan asked, "Then it's true?"

Ricki said, "Absolutely."

After Jackie and I dropped the tag belts, we worked in the territory for another month. For some reason, they quit pushing us as much as they had. They didn't bring us back to the Garden for a rematch with Rocca and Pérez, either, which would have been a natural return match since we were so hot. They came back on May 13 with Rocca and Pérez in the main event against Dick the Bruiser and Karl Von Hess. The house dropped by $18,000. They used us and then they dumped us, which was a lesson we always remembered. Nobody is irreplaceable.

On April 30, 1957, Jackie and I wrestled in single matches at St. Nick's Arena in New York City. When the matches were over, we went home and packed our suitcases. We were booked in the territory for the next few weeks, including the May 13 Madison Square Garden card. What Toots Mondt didn't know was, we wouldn't be making the shots … and we wouldn't be giving our notice.

The following morning, May 1, we got into the car and a new chapter in our lives began. In fact, Don Stevens was going to disappear into thin air, just as Don Kalt had four months earlier. It would be twelve months before Don Stevens appeared again.

Chapter 8
The Missing Toothbrush

I don’t know the story behind why Toots Mondt decided he wasn’t going to push us, but it was evident we weren’t being figured into their plans in any major way. I was worried we’d be pushed out entirely. Jack kept telling me, "Don’t worry about it, Don. We’ve got plenty of places to go."

One day, Jack said, "We’re goin’ to Nashville."

"Where?"

"Nashville. You’ll love it."

We weren’t being pushed in New York after our match with Rocca and Pérez, but we were still making good money. I wasn’t sure I wanted to go somewhere else. They say fear of the unknown is the worst fear there is. I tried to change his mind. "But I’ve never been there. I don’t know anything about it. Why can’t we stay here?"

"They told us we’ve been here long enough. Quit worrying. We’ll make some money."

When we pulled into Nashville on May 2, we went to see Roy Welch and Nick Gulas, the promoters, at the wrestling office. They made us sit in the waiting room for an hour. Evidently, they wanted us to know they were in charge. Jackie wasn’t going to stand for it. He stood up and said, "Come on, Don."

I said, "Where are we going?"

He muttered, "This is bullshit," and he walked to the receptionist’s desk. "We have things to do. We need to see Gulas and Welch now."

The receptionist, Nina Bond, tried to stop us. "You’ll have to wait."

Jackie gave her a look of dismissal and walked to the door that led to the offices in the back. Nina panicked. "You can’t go in there!" she said.

We found Roy and Nick sitting in Nick’s office. Jackie said, "You wanna do business with us … or not?"

Long story short, Roy and Nick did business with us, but they put us in all the bad towns. For the first three weeks, we were booked in Memphis, the best town, but the rest of the time, we were relegated to places like Dyersburg, Tennessee and Blytheville, Arkansas.

Our first booking was in Blytheville, where we were booked to wrestle Joe Welch and Ronnie McKay in the Legion Arena on May 6. Today, Interstate 55 runs from Memphis to Blytheville, but in 1957, we had to take a ferry across the Mississippi River. I could not believe it. There we were, fresh from Madison Square Garden, and we had to ride a ferry with mules and buggy wagons. I remember thinking, "What the hell have I gotten myself into?" I cursed Jackie more than a few times during the trip over for getting me into that situation.

Things got worse when we pulled up in front of the "arena." It was a small building that looked like it had been built at the turn of the century. It definitely had seen better days. There was no place to shower when we finished wrestling, either. I was prepared, though. Buddy Rogers constantly reminded me to keep a bottle of wintergreen alcohol in my bag, just in case I found myself in that kind of a situation. In lieu of a shower, I could wipe off with the alcohol.

The upside was the audience. The place was jam-packed with people, which was something I found in a lot of those small towns, or what we commonly referred to as "shit towns." Many times, other than the circus, we were the only entertainment those people had the opportunity to see.

Before I go on, there’s something I want everyone to understand. Whenever I say we drew a sellout crowd, or a packed house, I’m not saying my partner and I should get all the credit, or our opponents. We weren’t the only guys who drew those houses. Every wrestler on those cards helped draw the money we did. In most cases, there isn’t one wrestler who draws

the money. It’s a team effort that begins with the opening match and ends with the main event.

The clientele of the audience in the South was quite different from what I had experienced up north, as well. They were rednecks. Now, I like rednecks. In fact, I fit in with rednecks better than any other class of people, but at the time, I had never seen anything like them. They were chewing tobacco and spitting on the floor. It wasn’t just the men, either. I saw women with tobacco juice running over their bottom lip. Everybody wore levis, or blue jeans, as they called them, and everybody carried either a knife or a gun. They were salty, too. We had to fight our way back to the dressing room every night. No, I had never seen anything like it.

During the trip home later that night, I asked Jackie, "What the hell did you get me into, man? And why in the hell are we wearing these nice suits and ties?" In New York, everybody — fans and wrestlers alike — got dressed up for the matches.

It didn’t take me long to adapt to life in the South, though. Before I knew it, I was running around wearing bib overalls and barefooted. And not only did I hang around with rednecks — I became one.

Before we left New York, we had decided to change my name to Don "Fargo" so we could wrestle as the Fargo brothers. The match in Blytheville was the first time we used the Fargo name. In fact, in their advance publicity, the promoters billed us as "The Wild Fargo Brothers, world tag team champions." Once again, the world tag team title was ours.

For the next week, all our bookings were in small towns in Alabama. On May 9, we were wrestling Nick Carter and Chief Little Eagle [Richard Bryant] in Gadsden, Alabama. During the match that night, Carter stomped on my hand and broke one of my fingers. In the dressing room after the match, I was whining about whether or not I’d be able to wrestle with the broken finger. I heard one of the old timers on the other side of the room, "Good god almighty. Get a couple Popsicle sticks, tape it up, and wear it in the ring. Everybody will think you got a gimmick."

I didn’t know what he was talking about. "What’s a gimmick?" When he explained it, I thought, "What a great idea." My ignorance of the term "gimmick" was as bad as the first time I heard someone use the term "foreign object." I thought they were talking about something from another country. I took his advice, but I taped up two fingers, rather than just the one. I used that idea many times in the years ahead.

The following night, we wrestled Chief Little Eagle and the boss himself, Roy Welch, in Florence, Alabama. It pissed Jackie off that we were being used in what he called the "tank towns." Jack decided to call their bluff and told Nick, "You’re not messin’ around with the Fargos. Either you start using us better or we’re gone."

That did it. Nick gave us a big push and we got over great.

Everybody talks bad about Nick, but I’m here to set the record straight. Yes, Nick did a lot of bad things in his life and he didn’t treat people very well, but there are two sides to every story. In this case, there were two "people" to the story.

Nick’s partner, Roy Welch, was the good cop in the wrestling office. Nick Gulas was the bad cop. However, behind the scenes, Roy was the bad guy, but he passed on a lot of the heat to Nick. Nick didn’t mind, though. He walked around that office like a banty rooster. He would ignore people and act like he was the president of the United States.

From that point on, we almost always dealt with Nick. Roy just sat there and agreed with whatever Nick said. "Yeah, that’s a good idea."

The politics of the Nashville territory never changed, and it was always tough to talk directly with Nick. The first hurdle was Nina Bond, or later on, Donna Bower. If we got past Nina, Christine Jarrett was the next barrier. Christine was just doing her job. She was always nice to me. She always had a smile on her face and called me by my first name. "Hi, Donnie. It’s so good to see you again."

The money in the Tennessee territory was really good after Jackie told Nick we weren’t going to be pushed around. On the other hand, if we made $200,

we probably should have made $300.

Jackie would mess with my head every time we went to the office to get our money. When we opened our payoff envelopes, Jack would look in his envelope and say, "Oh, man!" He wouldn’t say anything else because he knew it would bug me. Invariably, my curiosity would get the best of me and I’d ask, "What?" He knew good and well that I’d take the bait.

"I didn’t think I’d have this good of a week." He’d pause for effect, and then he’d ask, "What’d you get?"

I’d hedge and say, "I guess I got the same thing you got."

He’d bug me until he got it out of me. "Well, how much?"

"I got seventy-five dollars."

"Oh! Ho, ho. You got cheated."

I’d believe him. The next time I saw Nick, I’d bitch and complain. Jackie got me all the time.

In July 2011, George Gulas brought me to Nashville for an autograph signing. Jackie told me he’d get my money for me. "Don’t worry. I’m gonna get your money."

"I know you’re gonna get it, Jake."

Sure enough, he got my money. When the show in Nashville was over, he started packing up to go. I asked him, "What about my money?"

He said, "I’ve gotta go, Don."

"What about my freakin’ money, damn you!"

"Don’t worry. You’ll get it."

"Hey, I want my money. You’re not leavin’."

Gulas finally laughed and said, "Don’t worry about it, Don. I’ve got it for you. Here."

He handed my envelope to me and I thanked him. I was happy at that point. Then Jack pulled me aside and whispered, "Now don’t let nobody know what ya got. Don’t let nobody know what ya got. We got a thousand bucks apiece."

"Oh, okay."

When I started to open my envelope, he said, "Don’t open it now. The other guys might see it and they don’t need to know what we got because they only got five hundred."

When he left, I counted my money. I got $800. "Dammit! I got cheated again."

He let me stew for a week before he called and confessed that he only got $800.

Bert Ruby, the promoter in Detroit, wanted our payoffs to be a big secret. Nobody was supposed to know what anybody else made. According to Bert, "Everybody makes different money."

When the matches were over, he would call us into his office and give us our payoff. He always put the money in a manila envelope and handed it to us like it was a present. He would put the envelope in the palm of his hand, shake our hand, and leave the envelope behind. He used to talk like this. "I’m gonna tell you something, kiddo. You did a wonderful job tonight." He would wink and say, "I’m gonna pay you a little extra. Hold out your hands." He’d count out money and suddenly stop. As if having a change of heart, he’d say, "I’m gonna pay you a little extra," and would count out another five bucks or so.

The first few times, I said, "I appreciate that."

He said, "Just keep this between the two of us."

"Oh, I won’t say a word."

When I left, another guy walked in past me and Bert did the same thing. It was a regular payoff, but he made it look like he was giving us more than he should have. He would tell everyone the same story. The sad thing is, most of us believed him until we compared notes.

One of the worst things you can do is to tell a wrestler to keep their mouth shut. When it came to money, they were always ready to tell everyone else how much they made. "Hey, I got an extra five bucks."

"Is that so? Well, so did I."

That caused a lot of friction between the boys, which was exactly what the promoters wanted. If they kept us fighting each other, we wouldn’t have time to fight them.

Jackie and I did well in Nashville. We made $1,000 to $1,500 a week or more. We did interviews and played two guys from New York who had come down to take over the South.

Everything was new to me. I didn’t know anything about country music, which we called hillbilly music at the time, but the first time I heard that music, I loved it. The closer we got to Nashville, the more country music I heard. "Who’s that?"

"That’s Hank Williams."

"Who’s that?"

"That’s Johnny Cash."

Being from the South, Jackie fit right in. In fact, he got over with everybody he met. He became friends with a lot of country-western singers and introduced me to Faron Young, Webb Pierce, Johnny Cash, Ernest Tubb, Loretta Lynn, and Hank Williams Jr.

Hank Williams Jr. appeared in Baton Rouge one night when Buddy Lee, a former wrestler, was his manager. Buddy took us down to see him and got

us backstage before the show. Hank was playing a piano in a room in the back. It wasn't country-western music, though. It was classical music. The guy could really play. A girl walked out and he said, "Let me introduce you to Loretta Lynn."

She was beautiful. I fell in love. I thought, "Wow!"

Jackie had the personality of a politician. He was in with everybody: doctors, lawyers, police, and athletes. We used to go down to the Ernest Tubb Record Shop on Broadway in downtown Nashville. Ernest had a radio program called Midnite Jamboree and he would put us on the air. Jackie would do impersonations of celebrities. He was so good at that, especially his take on Elvis Presley.

Jackie and I were always ribbing somebody. In the glove compartment of our cars, we had handguns that shot blanks. We'd drive down the highway and fire blanks at the other boys when we passed them.

Late one night, when we were 30 miles away from Nashville, we came upon a young black man hitchhiking. We told him to get in the back seat. I knew what Jackie was going to do. When the man got settled and relaxed, Jackie reached over and punched me in the shoulder. He said, "I'm tired of you messin' with my wife."

I said, "I ain't messin' with your wife, man."

"Don't lie to me, dammit! I'm tired of you messin' with my old lady.

"I'm not messin' with your old lady."

As things got more heated, the man was getting uncomfortable. He finally piped up and said, "You can let me out at the next corner."

Jackie turned and said, "Shut up."

"Yah suh."

The argument got more and more heated until Jackie reached over, opened the glove compartment, and pulled out the gun. The man sounded

desperate. "Hey, let me out now, please."

Jackie pointed the gun at me and shot twice. I threw myself backwards into the door, just like I had been hit by a couple of bullets. I slumped over and Jackie pulled to the side of the road. It was all I could do to keep from laughing when the poor man said, "Ah ain’t seen nuthin’."

Jackie turned around, pointed the gun at him, and said, "Get out. You’re gonna help me put him in the trunk."

"Yassuh, yassuh."

When Jackie opened my door, I slumped over and fell head first to the ground. "Don’t just stand there, kid. Help me pick him up."

After they put me in the trunk, Jackie made him get in the front seat and held the gun on him as he drove down the road. I could hear them talking. The kid kept saying, over and over, "Ah ain’t gonna say nuthin’. Just let me out. Ah ain’t seen nuthin’."

The first time Jackie had to stop at a red light, the passenger door flew open and the black man was high-tailing it down the road. Jackie jumped out and shot the gun into the air. When the man was out of sight, Jackie opened the trunk and let me out. We laughed until our sides hurt.

A couple of minutes later, we pulled into the parking lot of our favorite bar, which was located on the outskirts of town. Twenty or so minutes later, the cops and the black man walked into the bar. That poor black guy looked at Jackie, and then he looked at me. His eyes opened so wide I thought his eyeballs would pop out of his head. One of the cops asked, "Did one of you guys shoot the other?"

"What? We didn’t shoot anybody."

That man turned around and ran out. The cops laughed because they knew all about the things Jackie and I did. They figured we had been up to mischief. I still wonder what that black man thought about the incident. He sure had a great story to tell his family when he got home that night.

We used to go into classy restaurants, like Jack Dempsey’s in New York. Jack knew who we were, so we always got great service. He was a great host. He talked to everybody who came into his place. He’d walk up and ask, "Do you wanna hear some boxing stories?" Of course, everybody wanted to hear what Dempsey had to say. He had a table by the window. People walking by would wave at him and he’d wave back. He didn’t look at himself like a celebrity. He acted like an everyday, ordinary Joe.

We finished dinner one night and walked up to the cashier to pay our bill. Jackie turned his back to the cashier and started fiddling with something. When he turned back around, he had the end of a cigar crammed up his nose. He asked the cashier, "Got a light?"

We did that to a lot of people. You wouldn’t believe how many people would pull out a book of matches and light it. We’d breathe in to get it burning, tell them thank you, and walk off.

Another thing Jackie and I used to do was walk around the dressing room naked. We did it because it made the other guys uncomfortable. We’d get up close to someone and ask him a question. They would get fidgety and would back up a little because they just didn’t feel comfortable standing so close to a naked man. The farther back they moved, the closer we would get.

My favorite routine was to take my cigar, stick it in my butt crack, and walk into the dressing room. "Hey, you guys. Has anybody seen my cigar? I had it sitting right here where I was sittin’ and I can’t find it." I’d point to the bench and turn around, as if I was looking around the room for it. Of course, they’d see it hanging there. Someone would laugh and say, "It’s in your butt."

I’d pull it out, stick it in my mouth, and say, "Anybody got a light?"

"Oh, god. You’re sick, Fargo."

Yeah, we were, but we had a lot of fun doing those things.

Okay, I did it with my toothbrush, too. "Anybody seen my toothbrush?"

One of the favorite ribs Jackie and I liked to pull was with chewing gum. I'd take a stick of chewing gum out of my bag and make a big production of unwrapping it. When I had everybody's attention, I'd put it in my mouth and chew it up. A minute later, I'd say, "Jackie, I have to go talk to somebody. Hold my gum for me." I'd pretend to take it out of my mouth and hand it to him. Jackie would pull back the foreskin of his penis and act like he was putting the gum underneath it. A few minutes later, I'd come back into the dressing room and ask Jackie for my gum. Before I walked into the room, though, I had concealed my gum between my thumb and forefinger. When Jackie pretended to take it out and hand it me, I would shift it up to the front of my thumb and forefinger. I'd hold it up to make sure everybody saw it and I would put it back into my mouth.

Herb Welch was sitting in the dressing room one night when I was running around the dressing room in my birthday suit. He just sat there as calmly as he could, and with little or no expression, said, "Hey, Fargo! You know what you're doin' runnin' around with that thing of yours swingin' back and forth, don't you?"

"No, what?"

"You're showin' everybody how big your old lady is."

That was when I quit running around naked in front of everybody.

I admit I did things that drove everybody crazy, especially the promoters, but Jackie was the instigator. "Go do this, Don," or "Go do that, Don."

Back then, the speed limit was 75 miles an hour. Jackie would drive 100 miles an hour and tell me, "Climb up onto the roof of the car."

I'd climb out the window and up onto the roof — naked, without a stitch of clothes on — and get on my knees. When we passed other cars on the road, Jackie would honk the horn and I'd do a double bicep pose.

Our favorite trick of all time, though, was to get ahead of the other boys and, once we were far enough ahead, pull over to the side of the road. I'd get out and get into the trunk. Jackie would wait for them to pass us and

then he’d take off and catch up to them. He’d pass them and hold his speed steady so he stayed just a few yards in front of their car. When he honked the horn, it was the signal for me to do my part. I’d throw up the trunk lid and stand up, stark naked.

Jackie pulled a good rib on me one night. Jackie knew all the cops, so he told them what he wanted them to do. Ten minutes or so after we left Memphis, Jackie pulled over and said, "Hey, Don. Get in the trunk. I just passed the boys back there."

"Where?"

He said, "Back there. Just get in the trunk. Hurry, before they catch up to us. I’ll blow the horn when it’s time to stand up."

When the horn sounded, I opened the trunk lid and stood straight up with my arms extended out from my body. The cops hit the siren button and the blue lights began to spin. Man, I reached back and pulled the trunk lid down so fast. They pulled Jackie over and I heard them ask, "What’ve you got in the trunk?"

He said, "Oh, just a hitchhiker I picked up a few miles back."

I thought I was going to jail for sure.

Jackie and I ribbed each other so much, there was a time when I was afraid to leave the table in a restaurant or bar. If I had to go to the bathroom, I’d hold it as long as I could because he’d piss in my drink the minute I was out of sight. You may think I’m lying about all this, but that actually happened. I got him back, though. There were a few occasions when he went to the bathroom and I stirred his drink with my dick. Most of the time, though, we looked out for each other and reserved those pleasures for other people.

We would pull our car off the road and walk back out onto the shoulder of the road, naked as jaybirds. We pushed our penises back between our legs so we looked like women, pulled our hair down over our faces, and stood on the side of the road hitchhiking. Back then, all the truck drivers ran CB radios in their rigs. We did it so many times that the TV news featured a

short story about the police being on the lookout "for two naked, blonde women who were hitchhiking on the highway."

We pulled into the parking lot of a bar one night. It was way out in the middle of nowhere. We were naked, as always. We pulled our hair down over our faces, wore stupid-looking straw hats, and put phony Halloween teeth into our mouths. When we walked in, everybody just stopped and stared. When Jackie spoke, he sounded like the Goofy character from the Disney cartoons. "Hey, how far is Nashville from here? A-huh, a-huh." We turned around and walked back out.

I usually did the crazy stuff because Jackie would be driving. We would be driving down the road and a bunch of the boys in another car would pull up alongside us on my side of our car. I would stand up, completely naked, put my foot on the window sill, and jump from our car to theirs … while the cars were traveling at a high rate of speed. At other times, when the boys pulled up close behind us, I would leap from the trunk of our car onto their hood. My favorite trick was to open my door and lay over the sill. As always, I was naked. When Jackie pushed the brake pedal, the car door would swing fully open and I'd go with it. Jackie would then hit the brakes and the car door would swing back. He would be driving 70 miles an hour and I'd be swinging back and forth.

Ray Stevens came to work in Nashville shortly after Jackie and I got there. He saw me do that so many times that he finally asked me, "Don't you ever picture yourself lying face down on the pavement?"

I told him I didn't have time to think about it. I never even gave it a thought. For Ray to ask me that shows how risky the things I did were. He was a daredevil who did all kinds of dangerous things, but even Ray drew the line when it came to jumping from one moving car to another.

Jackie and I loved to gamble. We would bet on anything. We used to play license plate poker all the time for $100 bills. We used to take Don Cortez, one of Nick Gulas' referees, with us on trips. Jackie and Don would sit in the back of the car and play knock rummy. When they played at night, I'd fold a piece of tin foil around the cab light so it didn't bother me while I drove. They would play from the time we left the arena to when we pulled

into the driveway at home. They played for hundreds of dollars and they'd cuss each other constantly. "You knocked, you bastard!"

"I did not!

There were actually two wrestlers in the territory with the last name of Cortez. The other one was Chico Cortez. Chico was known for selling cheap photo prints and calendars at the matches. His stuff looked so bad. He'd cut wrestlers' heads out of programs and magazines, glue them and a calendar onto a piece of paper, and sell them. Many times, I'd be wrestling someone and I'd work hard to get the people worked up and into the match. Just about the time I was ready to do a move that was important to the outcome of the match, Chico would show up at ringside, shouting, "Pictures! Pictures! Get your pictures here!"

Jackie and I spent a lot of time betting at the horse track, too. We were both big gamblers, although he was into it a lot more than I was. One time, we stopped at a track on our way to New York. We lost every penny we had in our pockets. It wasn't that big of a deal because we knew we were going to get paid that night. We left the track late and really had to move to get to the matches on time, so we were barreling down the highway when Jackie looked in the rear-view mirror and saw a cop behind us. He pulled us over and told us, "You were going a hundred miles an hour in a seventy-mile-an-hour zone. You need to follow me to the station."

When we got there, we thought they'd just release us because everybody recognized us, but they told us our fine was $50. Of course, back then, we didn't have checks or credit cards, so we told them we didn't have any way to pay it. Jackie said, "Well, what about this," and took off his diamond rings and watch. "Can we leave these and pick them up later when we come back and pay the fine?'

"Sure, we're open all night."

They put the jewelry in a cloth bag and had Jackie sign a piece of paper. We went back that night after the matches and paid the fine.

While I’m on the subject of race tracks, I took my boy, Donnie, to the track one day when he was just a little kid. I used to dress him up in a suit and hat. I’d put a cigar in his mouth so people would look because I liked to attract attention. One day, I took him up to the betting window to place my bet. The girl in the window said, "Oh, that’s a cute little boy. The way you have him dressed is darling." She picked a dime up off the counter and pushed it towards him. "Here, take this."

I said, "What do you say?"

"Fuck you."

My wife gave me a look that would have killed a lesser man. She pulled him out of my arms and walked off. I know I shouldn’t have taught him those things, but it was so funny to see the reaction of people to the things he said.

Occasionally, Jackie and I would take him on trips with us. Jackie would sit in the driver’s seat and let Donnie sit on his lap. Jack would hunker down low, work the accelerator and steering wheel, and peek around the side of Donnie. Donnie loved it. He’d smoke a cigar and put his arm out the window, waving at people as they passed in the other direction.

At other times, Jackie would cut a hole in the center of a newspaper and hold it open against the steering wheel. To the people who passed by, it looked just like he was reading the newspaper while he was driving.

We just couldn’t stop doing crazy things.

I got kicked out of one hotel in Chattanooga for causing too much commotion. I was in the hallway in my underwear, dancing and having a good time. Jackie and I wore underwear that had wild patterns printed on them, and to blow the minds of the boys, we called each other every morning so we could be sure we wore the same pattern. When the maid walked out of a room, I grabbed her and began dancing. I didn’t mean any harm and she thought it was funny, but some of the hotel guests called the front desk and complained about the noise we were making. Someone came up and told me the front desk clerk wanted to see me downstairs. When I

walked up to the counter, he said, "Mr. Fargo. You'd better get your stuff and leave."

When I asked why, he said, "You cause too much trouble. We want you out of the hotel and we don't want you to come back."

That pissed me off, but I turned right around and went upstairs to gather my belongings. While I was there, I put on my diamond rings and necklaces, and put a big, expensive cigar in my mouth. When I got back downstairs, I looked at him and said, "You know you're throwing out a Fargo. That's a damned insult." I made sure he saw my diamond rings as I scolded him. "What's your name?" I don't remember what he said, but he gave me his name. I said, "You know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna buy this fucking hotel and fire your ass," and I walked out.

That wasn't the first time I had been thrown out of a hotel or a restaurant, and it wouldn't be the last.

Jackie was always looking for ways to make extra money. We hated to take people with us, but he liked the transportation money, so we would haul the poor Mexican wrestlers, most of whom didn't speak English. On one trip, Jack and I ate garlic chicken and drank beer for lunch. When it was time to leave for the town, Jack picked up three Mexicans and put them in the back seat. It was a hot summer day. Jack turned on the heater and rolled up the windows. The odor in the car was so bad. In broken English, one of the Mexicans said, "Amigo! Stop to eat soon? I'm hungry."

Jack said, "Not yet. It's too early."

A few minutes later, Jack let out an SBD … a silent, but deadly, fart. The Mexican piped up, "I smell chicken."

We cracked up. I laughed so hard and so long that my sides hurt.

When we went into a dry county [a county whose government forbids the sale of alcoholic beverages], Jack wouldn't tell anybody it was dry. He'd have a cooler full of beer in the trunk of the car. When the matches were

over, the first thing the Mexicans asked for was beer. "Cerveza! Cerveza!" Jack would open the trunk and charge them 75 cents a can.

Another way for us to make money was to cash in the plane tickets promoters sent us and drive. For instance, whenever Fred Kohler wanted us in Chicago, he'd send us plane tickets. In those days, tickets were refundable, so we would cash them in, hop into Jackie's Cadillac, and make the 500-mile drive from Nashville to Chicago. Jackie would say, "We'll cash these in, keep the bread, and drive the Cadillac."

I said, "Drive all the way from Nashville to Chicago when we could fly?"

"Yeah. We'll just get a couple cases of beer and hit the road."

It was such an honor to wrestle in Chicago's Marigold and Rainbo arenas. People think Vince McMahon Jr. was the first promoter to broadcast wrestling nationwide. In the late '40s, wrestling from Chicago was taped on Wednesday nights and televised in more than 300 cities over the DuMont network. Due to the popularity of the program, we were "stars" everywhere we went.

A wrestler from Utica, New York, who spent most of his career working in Nashville, was Len Rossi. Len was one hell of a performer. When Nick Gulas asked Jackie and me if we knew anybody who would make a good babyface for the territory, we said, "Yeah. Len Rossi."

Len had his first match in Nashville on May 6, 1958 when he wrestled Don Whittler. The following week, Jackie and I were wrestled Frank Hewitt and Brother Frank Jares. Jackie's brother, Sonny, came to the ring with us that night. During the post-match free-for-all in which we were getting the best of our opponents, Len came running out ... wearing the pink suit Buddy Rogers had given me. He jumped up onto the ring apron, over the top rope, into the ring, and hit us with one dropkick after another. The people went crazy. Len really got over that night and made his home right there in Nashville.

Len teamed with Tex Riley [Russell Riley] for almost five years. They were a great team, but it was a strange pairing because Riley was so much older

than Len. They could have wrestled as Tex and Len Riley, a father-son team. They drew a lot of money together, though. Tex was really old school. I called him "Humpy" because he was always bent over. He died of a heart attack on May 21, 1964 after a match in Savannah, Georgia, when he was 50 years old, which I couldn't understand because he was really mellow and never let anything bother him.

One of the guys who worked in the Nashville wrestling office was Pat Malone, who wrestled at one time as the Green Shadow. Pat was tough. He was a true shooter. Like most shooters, though, he was the shits as a worker. He came from a different age and the wrestling business changed so much during the '40s and '50s.

In fact, the four Welch brothers — Jack, Herb, Roy and Lester — who pretty much controlled wrestling in the South, were all tough guys who were respected for their ability to take care of themselves in the ring. I didn't mess around with them. They weren't what you would call classic wrestlers, by any means. For that matter, they really didn't know a whole lot about wrestling, but they knew how to mix it up. In the '50s and '60s, they wrestled like they were still in the 1930s. They didn't like the new gimmicks coming into the wrestling business, either. They didn't care about arm drags, go-behinds, or bodyslams. They were scrappers. They'd hook you and put on the pressure. There was no pretending when they were in the ring. When they clamped on a hold, they made sure you felt it, and to their credit, they expected you to give it back in return. Whenever I worked with them, I learned to work their style, but I was always glad to work with somebody who knew how to work the flashier, more modern style of wrestling.

Pat Malone had a one-room building behind his house with wrestling mats covering every surface — the floor, walls, and even the ceiling. Behind the building, he had a big cage where he kept a bear named Ginger. He'd invite the boys to come out and shoot with her.

I went out there quite often, and the one thing I learned during my time there was that you cannot beat a bear. If you approach the bear like you would another wrestler, it would hook up with you just like a man. Before you had a chance to blink, though, it would slip behind you and take you

down to the mat. Once the bear has you down, you have a snowball’s chance of escaping. In fact, if their handlers didn’t pull them off, they would smother you.

That bear beat the hell out of me so many times. The first time I wrestled Ginger, Pat brought her out on a chain and had her muzzled so she couldn’t bite. He said, "You want to wrestle a bear? Here she is."

He unhooked the chain and did something to the bear — pulled a hair out of her ass or something — which made her stand up on her hind legs and growl. When I reached up to lock up with her, she lashed out with one of those big paws and whacked me across the side of my head. I don’t think she was really mad. I think she was just playing. I fell to the mat and the bear leaped on top of me. When a bear gets on you like that, they tuck you underneath their body and try to smother you. I was screaming and hollering for Pat. "Get her off me, dammit! I can’t breathe. Get her off!"

I heard Pat’s son was playing with the bear one day when Ginger got upset and chewed him up pretty badly.

Years later, when I was wrestling in Dallas, I met another bear handler named Tuffy Truesdell. I had my boy Donnie with me, so I took him to the dressing room to see Tuffy’s bear, Victor. Victor was in a cage, but he could stick his paws through the openings between the bars. I was holding Donnie’s hand, telling him, "Look at him. Get up closer. He can’t get out." The bear grabbed my boy by the legs and pulled them out from under him. He was pulling him towards the cage, while I was pulling on his arms, trying to get him away from the bear. Tuffy finally came in and helped us. It was a good thing Tuffy had the bear declawed because he would have torn off my boy’s legs.

Someone I wrestled a lot in the Nashville territory was Lester Welch, the youngest of the four Welch brothers. Lester used to scare the hell out of me. Not in the ring, but in the air. He owned his own airplane. From what I observed, he had no emotions whatsoever. I remember flying through really bad storms and he was as calm as anyone could be.

I always preferred to sit up front with Lester so I could look out the front window. It wouldn't have helped if we had to make a crash landing, but it just made me feel better to be able to see what was in front of us. On one particular trip to Chattanooga, several of us were all cooped up in his plane. We came up on a squall line, a band of thunderstorms, which is an extremely hazardous weather condition for aircraft. Somehow, we suddenly found ourselves in the middle of the squall. The plane began to shake and we were bounced from side to side. I really thought the plane was going to tear itself apart. When I looked out the window, all I could see were mountains. If we went down, there was no place we could land safely. The next thing we knew, a siren in the cabin began to sound. Everybody was beginning to panic … except for Lester. He was as calm as ever and didn't seem to be bothered in the least. To his credit, Lester stayed on course and got us into Chattanooga safely.

The first thing I did when we walked into the Municipal Auditorium was to find someone who would give me a ride back to Nashville … in a four-wheeled vehicle that traveled on the ground!

One time, Lester said he had to make a stop during the trip home. When he began to make preparations for a landing, I looked out the window to see if I could spot the runway. The landing area was a cow pasture with a short runway. We landed safely, but it was scary. When we climbed out, one of the guys dropped to his knees and kissed the ground.

On one trip, I asked Lester, "Do you have parachutes in this plane? What happens if we go down?"

As calmly as ever, he said, "I have a forty-five under the seat."

He had no emotion. When we went to the Gulf Coast Wrestlers' Reunion in Mobile, everybody had to walk by a table where he sat. He looked like a statue. He would nod his head, but he showed no emotion whatsoever.

Chapter 9
Down the River without a Paddle

On July 24, 1957, Nick sent us to work in the Mobile territory. Lee, Don and Bobby Fields [Hatfield] were the big names there. Their father, Speedy Hatfield, was married to Roy Welch's sister, so they had ties to the Welch clan.

On the outskirts of Mobile, we saw a huge billboard with the words, "From New York City — Jackie and Don Fargo — World Tag Team Champions!" We couldn't believe it. Banners tied to light poles stretched from one side of the street to the other.

When Jackie and I went to the ring that night, we weren't the "Fabulous Fargos." We were known as "The Fargo Brothers." The announcer that night started it all, though, by introducing us: "Ladies and gentlemen. Here they come. Direct from New York's Madison Square Garden! The one … the only … the Fabulou-uuus Fargo brothers!" When we heard that, we strutted across the ring. The "Fabulous" nickname stuck with us from then on.

That night, 7,500 rabid fans came to Ladd Memorial Stadium for our debut. We dressed in the football players' locker room, which was behind the end zone. When we first walked out, Jackie and I looked out over the field and couldn't believe our eyes. We didn't wrestle outdoors up north. The cards were all held in big buildings like Madison Square Garden. We were amazed to see all the people packed into this huge stadium. The grandstands were sold out and they had chairs out on the field.

Let me tell you, it was a long way from the dressing room to where the ring was set up in the center of the field. We came out wearing our sequined jackets and strutted all the way to the ring. That was a long strut. I almost blew up before I got to the ring. They had never seen us before, but those

people were booing and screaming. Of course, they didn't play music for entrances back then, so the only sound came from the people.

After we strutted around the ring a couple of times, Lee and Bobby Fields came out. They looked so sharp in their white boots and tights. And then … the unthinkable happened. They copied our strut. They strutted to the ring and the people went totally nuts.

Jackie and I blew our tops. We kicked the ropes and shouted at the crowd. We couldn't believe they'd disrespect us in such a manner.

The Fields boys were over big time in Mobile, but I don't think they were ever as over as they were that night. Copying our strut was a clever thing to do. But that wouldn't be the first time Lee Fields did something I thought was brilliant. He was a great promoter who knew exactly what the people of Mobile wanted, and he gave it to them in spades for the next 17 years.

That night, Jackie and I stumbled upon a comedy bit by accident. At one point during the match, I didn't realize Jackie was behind me. He had Lee on his hands and knees and was kicking him in the midsection. I picked up Bobby to body slam him, but when I stepped back, I tripped over Lee and Bobby came down with his body draped over mine. I kicked out to avoid the pin and scooted outside the ring, which Jackie and I often did when we found ourselves in trouble. Jackie got the idea at the same time and scooted out on the opposite side of the ring. When Lee and Bobby left the ring and began chasing us, I ran around the ring in one direction, while Jackie ran in the other. As I rounded one corner of the ring, Jackie was just rounding the corner from the opposite direction. Since we were both looking back to see where our opponents were, we didn't realize we were on a collision course. We ran right into each other and fell to the ground. We hit so hard that our bodies made a loud cracking noise when we made contact. Of course, the people loved it. We put that bit into our matches from then on and it never failed to make the people laugh.

I didn't do things like that often. I cut up a lot when I was away from the arenas, but I tried to be professional in the ring. I didn't want the people to think wrestling was a joke, or something to be taken lightly. There were guys, though, who did their best to make us laugh. They would cut a loud

fart, wrinkle up their nose, and back away from me. Of course, the people all thought I did it. At other times, they'd catch me around the neck with a head scissors and let go with an SBD (silent, but deadly fart). They would hold me there until the smell dissipated. Some of the old-timers would press their fingers into my ribs and tickle me, trying to make me laugh, and once I started to laugh, it was hard to stop. There were times when I couldn't cover it up, so I'd point at someone in the crowd and act like I was laughing at them.

It was a different story when I wasn't wrestling. I played so many ribs on the guys that they would look at me in the dressing room and ask, "What the fuck are you thinking about doing now, Fargo?" If I wasn't wrestling, I was thinking of something I could do to make someone laugh, or a prank I could pull on somebody. The guys would all look at me with that "He's up to something" expression on their face.

I liked to rib Speedy Hatfield, the father of Lee, Don and Bobby. He frequently brought his grandson, Randy Hatfield, to the towns. One night, when Randy was just a little boy, I was kidding around with Speedy. I'd pinch him on the ass. He couldn't stand that. He'd get all worked up. I kept goading him until he reached into his pocket to get the knife he always carried. I said, "You go for that knife, you old bastard, and I'll break you in two … ah-hhhhhh!" I felt a sharp, searing stab of pain. That little son-of-a-bitch, Randy, had pulled out his own knife and stuck it in my ass. I looked at him and said, "Damn! He stuck me."

Speedy grinned and said, "Just be glad it wasn't me. It would have been a lot worse."

One day, I drew a cartoon of Speedy on a tractor, drunk, with a bottle of whiskey in one hand and holding the steering wheel with the other. I had cows lying behind the tractor, as if he had run over them, and the fence had been knocked down. He loved it. Everybody who saw it said, "Yeah, that's Speedy."

I used to tell him, "I don't know why they call you Speedy because, as a referee, you're the slowest son-of-a-bitch I've ever seen. Why is it that when I have my opponent's shoulders down, you have a hard time getting

your arm up to count, but when my shoulders are down, you give it a quick one, two, three. Where in the hell did you get that name? The babyfaces must have given it to you because the heels sure didn't."

I don't get embarrassed easily, but I had a few moments during my career which made me feel really stupid. On one occasion, my opponent and I were criss-crossing the ring and coming off the ropes. What I didn't know was that the ring crew hadn't tightened the ropes properly. When I hit the top rope, the turnbuckle came loose and the ropes sagged. I went backwards over the top rope, landed on my upper shoulders on the ring apron, and wound up in a heap on the floor. I felt so stupid. The people started laughing and every bit of my heat disappeared.

Another time, before the match began, Jackie and I did the strut back to our corner. I grabbed the top rope with both hands and leaped into the air, intending to vault the top rope and land on my feet on the ring apron. My foot got caught underneath the rope and I landed face-first on the apron. The people went wild.

One night in Birmingham, I was coming off the ropes and hitting my opponent with tackles. After I did that twice, he dropped down and I jumped over him. I rebounded off the ropes on the other side of the ring and prepared to do the same thing when I came off the ropes in the other direction. This time, though, my foot caught underneath his body and I went flying. I flipped forward, landed on my head, and rolled right through the ropes and onto the floor.

The worst incident, however, took place in 1962 when I was wrestling in Abilene. My opponent threw me in the ropes and brought up his fist, intent on dropping me when I rebounded off. I did the Buddy Rogers move of stopping my momentum by wrapping my arm around the top rope and strutting, as if I had been too smart for my opponent. I took one step in the strut and caught my toe on the heel of my other foot. I twisted my ankle as I went down and I couldn't stand up. The only thing I could do was whisper frantically to my opponent, "Cover me! Cover me!" The promoter had to send out some of the boys to carry me back to the dressing room.

One month after Jackie and I made our debut in Mobile, we had Sonny Fargo come in as our manager. Sonny, who was Jackie's real brother, was a referee for Jim Crockett in the Charlotte territory. Sonny came to visit Jackie from time to time, so we decided to put him to work as our manager in August 1957.

Since we would be wrestling Mario Galento [Bonnie Lee Boyette] and a variety of tag team partners, Lee Fields wanted us to generate some kind of excitement and hostility between us by pulling some kind of publicity stunt in public.

The Princess House restaurant was located directly across the street from our hotel. We knew the cook and the owner, so we ate there a lot. Mario did, too. Lee told us, "You guys go into the Princess House and stir up some crap with Galento. He eats lunch there every day."

As we walked past Mario's table, I looked down and loudly said, "You're a no-good piece of garbage." That got the attention of everyone in the restaurant. Mario stood up and threw a wild haymaker at me. It landed and I went down. Jackie ran over and they began to flail away at each other. Tables and chairs were knocked over, food and drink went every which way, and the people were screaming and trying to get out of the way. The owner knew us, but he didn't know anything about what we were doing. "Please, stop!" He was screaming and hollering, begging us to take our differences outside.

Eventually, the cops showed up and took us all outside. When they asked us to explain ourselves, we began to point fingers at one another.

"He started it."

"No, he started it."

"You're a damn liar."

"Take that back or I'll give ya what's comin' to ya."

The cop who seemed to be in charge didn’t fall for it. "I know what you guys are doing. You’re trying to get publicity, but you picked one hell of a place to do it."

We all began to argue. Mario pointed at me and said, "This ain’t no publicity stunt. I’m gonna kick his ass."

The cop said, "Shut up!" He turned to Sonny, who was standing a few feet away from us on the sidewalk and asked, "Were you a part of this?"

At the time, Jackie, Sonny and I all dressed alike. That day, the three of us were wearing red shirts with collars, white pants, white shoes, and goofy-looking hats. Sonny said, "I don’t even know those guys. I’ve never seen them before." He turned away and walked off. It was so funny.

From the first day we arrived in the South, we wanted everybody to think we came from New York, so we talked like New Yorkers. "Yah, we know what it’s all about, man. We have a fast cah. It has a good rah-dee-ater in it."

When we cut promos, Jackie and I usually passed the mic back and forth. When Sonny appeared with us that week, it was his first opportunity to be on television. For some reason, after Jack and I said what we had to say, the announcer looked at Sonny and said, "What do you think about that, Sonny Boy?" and passed him the mike.

Sonny didn’t hesitate. "Ah reckon them fellas is in fo’ trouble on account o’ mah brothers is a-gonna take care of ‘em."

Sonny couldn’t have sounded less like New York and more like a southern redneck if he had tried. We thought, "The jig’s up. These people will see through us now."

We had so much heat, though, that Sonny’s blunder seemed to go right over their heads. Nobody said a word about it. Sonny turned out to be a great manager and I was proud to have him with us.

Jackie loved it when I would do things to aggravate Sonny. Sonny always slept in the back seat and nothing we did would wake him. One night, when we were driving home from Chattanooga, I took out my pen knife and cut his pants leg from the cuffs up to his thigh. Jackie laughed and said, "Get his shirt, too." I cut his shirt into so many strips that Sonny could have played flag football with it. When he got out of the car and realized what I had done, he wanted to kill me.

Another time, we got into a legitimate argument. Before he went to sleep, he put his packet of plug tobacco on the back of the seat. When he was asleep, Jackie said, "Take it and cut it up."

I knew better, but I was a sucker for things Jackie told me to do. I took out my knife and cut it into little pieces. When he woke up, he raised all kinds of hell. I threw a cup of beer on him. He didn't say anything, but when I turned back around, he poured a cup of beer over my head. I said, "That's it. Stop the goddamn car."

Jackie stopped the car and we all got out. I took off my watch and rings and told Jackie to hold them. "I ain't holdin' that shit." I turned around and, catching Sonny off-guard, pushed him down. He got up and smacked me right in the jaw. At that point, I was ready to fight. Sonny looked at me and said, "You're scared … and I'm glad of it." The way he said it was so funny. We all started to laugh and we all hugged. That's the only time Sonny and I had any real problem.

Sonny was real proper, too. He wanted his eggs cooked sunny-side up, and he wanted them cooked perfectly so the yolk was a perfect yellow. He'd eat the white first and save the yolk for his toast. He'd use his knife and fork to carefully lift up the yolk and place it on his toast. One day, Jackie said, "Take your fork and scramble it all up." I did it, but there was hell to pay.

We used to argue about everything, but it was all in good fun. He used to say, "You're a plumb idiot."

I'd say, "What do you mean a plum idiot?"

"You're a plumb idiot."

"A plum is not an idiot. A plum is something you eat."

Or he'd say, "You left me down the river without a paddle."

I'd say, "It's not down the river without a paddle. It's up the river without a paddle."

Sonny teamed up with Jackie in New York for about eight months in 1960, but spent most of his career as a referee in the Charlotte territory. He loved his wife and children so much that he didn't want to be on the road and away from them. He really hit his stride, though, in Tennessee. He came into the territory billed as Jackie's crazy brother "Roughhouse." He played the part perfectly, even though it was so far removed from his characteristic, soft-spoken, mild-mannered personality. Sadly, Sonny died on August 20, 2008 from complications of diabetes when he was 80 years old.

That first run in Mobile was one of the best times of my life, but it also was the beginning of some of the bad times.

I went through a few rough times in my life when drugs and alcohol got the better of me. Most of the time, I would drink and take whatever, but by match-time, I would be ready to wrestle. I never let substance abuse affect my performance.

In Panama City, they put the ring out in the bay and erected bleachers on the beach. They put us in a little boat and rowed us out to the ring. The people loved to see it because we would go over the top rope, hit the water, and splash around. After a few weeks, Jackie and I got the idea of getting there early and hiding whiskey underneath the ring. We'd tell our opponents to throw us over the top rope. When they did, we'd swim under the ring, take a big swig of whiskey, and come back up. A few minutes later, we'd have them throw us out again.

When I was in Mobile in 1957, I was introduced to speed. The pills were heart-shaped and came in two colors: green and pink. I took one of each and drank a can of beer to wash them down. In the hours that followed, I went to a bar and drank another beer … and then another … and several others

after that. I don’t know how long I was there, but I didn’t go to the matches and I was there when they closed the bar.

To make a long story even longer, I woke up in the YMCA. Late that afternoon, I returned to the bar and began taking pills and drinking again. Once again, I missed the show and slept at the YMCA.

Lee Fields and all my peers were looking for me. Fields wanted to find me so he could fire me and Jackie wanted to find me so he could sober me up and get me back into the ring. It was Jackie’s brother, Sonny Fargo, who found me the next day at the Y. He had taken my place on the two shows I had missed. "Don! Do you wanna work tonight? We’ve got a sellout. Stud (Lee Fields’ nickname) wants to get rid of you, but Jack and I want you with us."

Sonny called Jackie and told him to come to the Y. Together, they forced coffee down my throat and made me sit under a cold shower for a long time. By match-time, I was ready to go. Nobody said a word when we walked into the dressing room that night, but afterwards, I got one hell of a lecture from Lee Fields and Rocky McGuire. They told me they wanted to get rid of me, but they were doing such good business, they knew they’d be shooting themselves in the foot. "You’ve gotta promise, Fargo … you won’t do that no more!"

I promised. And I didn’t. Well, at least, for a long time after that.

Chapter 10
The Hard Way

One night, very early in my career, I walked into the dressing room to see Buddy Rogers taping up his forefinger. I went over to see what he was doing. He looked up at me and said, "That’s how you do it, kid."

I asked, "Do what?"

I noticed a razor blade on the bench beside him with a corner missing. He lifted his hand and held his pointed index finger in front of my face. I could just make out a glint of metal protruding upwards from the tape. It was the missing piece of the razor blade. Before I could ask about it, someone walked in and said, "Come on, Buddy. You’re on."

Buddy said, "I’ve gotta go."

I couldn’t believe it. I said, "Are you outta your fuckin’ mind? You’re gonna keep that blade on your finger while you’re wrestling?"

He grinned and said, "I sure am, Pally."

I had been ready to go, but I decided to stick around and watch Buddy’s match. After 30 minutes or so had passed, his opponent made a big comeback and hit Buddy in the face. Buddy fell face-first to the mat and covered his face in the crook of his left arm. His right hand was positioned behind his left forearm and it looked like he was massaging his forehead. When he looked up, his face was a mass of blood. I suddenly tumbled onto the fact that he had used the razor blade to cut his forehead.

On the trip home that night, I asked Buddy to tell me about the blade. "Well," he said, "There are a couple of ways to do it. One way is to do it outside the ring. When your opponent hits you, fall out of the ring and onto the floor. With your head almost under the ring, bury your head in your

arms and use one of your hands to cut yourself. Close your mouth and force the blood to your head. When you stand up, you'll have blood running down your face. The other way is to do it in the ring, which is the way I like to do it. When my opponent hits me, I blade myself when I fall to the mat."

Neither way really appealed to me. In fact, it scared me to think about using a razor blade to cut myself. I asked him, "Is there any other way to do it?"

"Yeah … if you wanna get punched for real. It's called the hard way. I don't know many people who are too keen on doin' that, though."

He didn't say anything else about that and nobody I talked to in the weeks and months that followed did.

After that night, I noticed several of the guys with white tape on their ends of their fingers. I was just a mid-card guy, so I never was asked to cut myself, but I remember thinking, "I'll tape up my fingers just to make the fans wonder." I didn't tape up just my forefinger, though. I taped up two fingers. As soon as I got into the ring, I heard one of the people at ringside say, "He's got somethin' on his fingers."

In a way, it really broke my heart when I learned about things like the blade because I liked to keep things legit. I was okay with working, rather than actually wrestling, but I wanted everything I did to be beyond reproach. Buddy actually had to sit down with me one time and tell me, "If you want to make money, you need to go with the flow."

In those early days of my career, I didn't get blood in the Columbus or Tennessee territories, and I don't remember anybody getting blood in New York. That was fine with me. I wasn't going to mess up my forehead.

So much for that pipe dream.

I held firm to that decision until I went to Mobile. When I got there, everybody was getting blood, but what turned me on to blood was when I saw Bobby Fields do something one night that I had never seen before. That was the night I was introduced to the actual experience of seeing "the

hardway." I had never seen anything like it and it intrigued me. In fact, I got addicted to it.

It’s fairly easy to do a hardway if you know what you’re doing. The easiest way is to bring your knuckles down hard on the ridge of bone above the eyebrow of your opponent. When your knuckle bones connect, the skin will break open. You have to hit fast and hard, though. If it isn’t done correctly, it will simply knock your opponent silly. There were times when my opponent made two or three attempts to break me open, but didn’t break the skin, and there were times when they would miss and accidentally hit me in the nose. I would see a flash of light and a gusher of blood would begin to flow, but blood from my nose wasn’t the effect I wanted.

I never asked my opponents to bleed. I preferred to do it myself. I’d work them over, and when they made their comeback, I’d tell them to nail me in the forehead. When they did, the blood would fly. The people who saw me never yelled "Fake!" or "Bullshit!" They were convinced that what we were doing was real … because it was.

The first time I asked Ernie Ladd to do it to me, he balked. He didn’t want to do it. "I’ll cut you with a blade if you want, but I don’t think I can do that." He wanted to cut me with a blade, but he was too scared to break me open the hard way, which was reasonable. I talked him into it and, with one punch from his big fist, he split my eyebrow open.

My reputation for doing hardways spread so that when I wrestled in the South, all the wrestlers wanted to work with me so they could bust me open. I would do it every night of the week. There were times my head would be swollen like a watermelon.

I tried to get Jackie to do it, but he just wouldn’t go for it. If a promoter asked him to get juice, he’d say, "Don will do it."

Jackie did that a lot. "Hey, Jackie! Will you take a back drop over the ropes tonight?"

"Don will do it."

Bobby Fields was the master of the hardway. He used a blade, too, but only when his head was so sore he couldn’t take it the hard way. One night, rather than tape the blade to his finger, Bobby carried it to the ring in his mouth. I had never seen that before, although I later saw a lot of guys do that. I thought it was stupid and said so. "That’s going too fuckin’ far." During the match, Bobby accidentally swallowed it and it stuck in his throat. He dropped to his knees and began choking. He made the most god-awful gurgling noises I had ever heard. I thought he was going to die right there, but he suddenly spit it out onto the mat.

A lot of the guys were clumsy and careless, too. I saw guys tape those razors to their fingers and accidentally cut one of their opponents when they hooked up. In another case, when one guy was using a blade, his opponent booted him in the face. His foot hit the blade and it sliced the guy’s forehead open from one side to the other. They had to rush him to the hospital when they couldn’t stop the bleeding.

I’d get so pissed when a fan would say, "You guys use razor blades to get blood."

I’d tell them, "Take a close look at my face, mother fucker. Razor blades don’t make jagged scars like I’ve got. And how dumb would I have to be to carry a razor blade into the ring?"

One night, I was sitting at a bar in the airport. I had stitches above my right eye and it was quite black from the pounding I had taken earlier that night. The guy sitting next to me turned and asked, "Are you a fighter?"

I said, "No, I’m a wrestler."

He leaned towards me to take a closer look at my eye and said, "You guys use that fake blood, don’t you?"

I said, "What do you mean by fake blood?"

He said, "Well … capsules."

"Blood capsules?"

"Yeah, like they use in Hollywood."

"What do you mean Hollywood blood capsules? I've never heard of 'em."

He said, "Well, you know … you take a blood capsule and you bite it, or you take it and push it on your forehead."

"Where would I keep them?"

"Oh, you put them in your tights."

I asked him, "Did you ever see us bleed?"

"Oh, gosh, yeah. I've seen wrestlers bleed all over the place."

I said, "Let's talk a little common sense here. I put blood capsules in my trunks to get blood on my head. I'd have to have blood capsules about this big," and I held my two hands about three inches apart. I went on and said, "I'd have to have ten to twenty capsules to make it look good. Then, while I'm wrestling, I reach down into my tights and don't find a capsule because the son-of-a-bitch melted and the blood's running down my fuckin' leg."

He just stared at me because he was beginning to realize just how stupid and foolish he was. I said, "So what do you do for a living?"

He told me he was a doctor. A doctor! You'd think a doctor would have enough common sense to realize you couldn't put enough blood in one, much less ten capsules, to make it look like we were bleeding. I said, "Sir, I can't read or write, and I have no education, but I do know I can't put twenty blood capsules into my tights and not have them melt while I'm sweating or bust while I'm bouncing around the ring.

We didn't make the money the guys make today, but we made big money for the time. Even then, most of the guys had to exaggerate the amounts of money they made. Jackie was bad about that. He didn't want anybody to think he made low money.

That's why I chose to do hardways. Promoters would pay an extra $25 for a hardway, which, in the '50s and '60s, was a lot of money. We could buy

draft beer at a bar for just ten cents, and my car payments were only $90 a month. If I was running short when the rent came due, I could do hardways and make my rent money in a few nights, and the extra cash allowed me to buy more rifles and pistols. Pistols were really cheap. We could get them for $50 or less.

I had a girlfriend when I was wrestling in Baton Rouge in the late ‘60s. Her family was poor, so every time I got a payoff for doing a hardway, I’d take the $25 and buy groceries. I could buy enough groceries with that money to last them almost a week.

I’d go to the promoter and say, "Listen, I don’t like to use a blade because some of the fans are wise to it and I don’t want ‘em to think that’s what I’m doin’. For an extra twenty five, I’ll let ‘em bust my eye open."

The promoters back then were old-time wrestlers. They’d look at me and ask, "Are you serious?"

They couldn’t believe I’d do it. I’d say, "Yeah, but I’ve gotta have twenty five dollars for it."

They were all for it. "Well, that’s a tough way to make twenty five dollars, but I’m all for it if it will make our matches look better."

I cheated on the hardways, too. When I went back to the dressing room after my match, I’d use Nu Skin to close the wound. The following day, before I left the house, I’d use my wife’s pancake makeup to cover up the scar. I got pretty good at it and could spread it out so it looked smooth. The promoter in the town the following night didn’t know I had been busted open the night before, so I’d convince him to pay me extra to do a hardway. That night, all my opponent had to do was hit the scar and it would open right up. It didn’t hurt as badly when I was already opened up, either.

In his book, ATLAS: Too Much, Too Soon, Tony Atlas wrote about his foot fetish. I don’t know if what I had would be considered a fetish because I did have my limits, but I really loved pain. If the people reading this book learn just one thing, I want them to understand that, when we were wrestling, we weren’t playing around. We weren’t dancing. We were beating the hell out

of each other. I don’t remember anybody ever yelling "Fake!" when I was in the ring. We made believers out of the people. Strangely enough, we didn’t feel the pain when we were wrestling. Our blood was rushing through our veins, we were sweating, and our adrenaline was pumping.

The only time I felt pain when I was in the ring was when I wrestled somebody who didn’t know what they were doing, like the guy who tried to give me a hardway without knowing how to do it. One thing I do know, however, is that I sure as hell felt it the next morning. I used to wake up in the mornings and sit on the edge of the bed for 10 to 20 minutes before I could move. I’d sit there and think, "How the fuck did I hurt my back?" or "What did I do to hurt my leg." I couldn’t remember how those things happened.

Today, I’m 86 years old (I think) … and I still sit on the edge of the bed in the mornings.

Mario Galento was in Mobile when Jackie and I were there. Mario was the greatest. He could do something simple like reach up into his hair and the fans would yell at the referee, "He’s got a clothes pin in his hair!" He could make people react to just about anything he did.

On July 31, 1957, our second night in Mobile, Mario had Rube Wright as his partner against us. Mario had a lot of heat in the territory, so Jackie and I were the babyface team. It was a two-out-of-three-fall match and we had to go back to the dressing room between falls. After the first fall, Rocky McGuire came back and told Galento and Rube, "We have a problem, boys. Some guy out there wants to take the place of one of the Fargos against you. We’ve gotta let him in the ring. He’s raising holy hell and makin’ us look bad.

I said, "Let the guy stand on the ring apron. We’ll scare him good. Tell Galento I’ll start the match and he needs to bust me open the hard way."

McGuire said, "Then I gotta pay you twenty five extra dollars."

"Do you wanna save the town?"

McGuire could have told the guy he couldn’t get into the ring, but the guy had made such a spectacle of himself that the people would have thought we were afraid to take him up on his challenge. It had become a matter of saving face. Of course, once I mentioned a hardway and an opportunity to make extra money, Jack had to jump in. "No, let me do the hardway."

"Hey, it was my idea. Galento will do it and it’ll give the guy second thoughts about gettin’ into the ring. If that don’t scare him, we’ll let him come in."

Things went the way I had laid them out. Mario busted me open and blood poured down my face. When Jackie came in to help, Mario busted him open, too. That didn’t deter the mark [wrestling fan], though. If anything, it made him madder and more determined to get into the ring. Suddenly, he stepped through the ropes and went after Mario. They looked like a couple of broads fighting. They were kicking, pulling hair, and scratching each other with their fingernails.

Rube Wright wasn’t stupid. Before he left the dressing room, he got a small iron pipe out of his suitcase and took it with him. It was short enough to fit unnoticed in his hand. When Mario and the guy got into it, Rube came into the ring and smashed the pipe over the guy’s head. Blood poured out like a faucet had been opened. Jackie and I couldn’t do anything because we were supposed to be all but unconscious from the beating we had taken, but we had to do something because the guy was bleeding pretty badly. We rushed Mario and Rube, hit them with dropkicks, and sent them scurrying out of the ring and back to the dressing room. I don’t know what happened to the guy after that, but he took a terrible beating at the hands of those two. I felt badly for him, but we needed to set examples like that so people didn’t feel warranted to do the same thing.

There weren’t a lot of guys who were willing to take a hardway. Lee Fields, Bob Kelly, and Bobby Fields were a few of the guys who were always ready to do it. They were as tough as nails.

Jimmy Golden’s dad, Bill Golden, was the promoter in Baton Rouge. One night, Bill was the special referee for a match between Bobby Fields and

me. He came to me before the match and said, "Fargo, how about you bust my eye open the hard way tonight?"

I wasn’t surprised because Bill liked to get involved in the action from time to time. By the 15-minute mark in the match, Bobby and I both were bleeding like crazy. The plan was for Bill to climb through the ropes and I’d hit him as he straightened up, but when I went to hit him, he blocked me. Apparently, he got scared and changed his mind about getting busted open. I lit into him, but no matter what I did, I couldn’t get him into a position to open him up. He kept blocking me. I finally knocked him backwards and down to the mat. Straddling his chest, I pulled up on his hair, stretching the skin of his forehead tight, and slammed my knuckles down across his eyebrow as hard as I could. He bled buckets. The people at ringside weren’t yelling fake that night.

Chapter 11
Eating Beans

In 1958, a Jewish man named Jack Pfefer [Jacob Pfefer] heard about Jackie and me. In May of that year, Pfefer took a train to Nashville and showed up on Jackie’s doorstep. Jackie and I were living in a trailer park on Dickerson Road. Our families were really close, so we had bought two trailers, side by side.

Jack Pfefer stood about five-foot-five, had unkempt, dirty hair, long fingernails, and he wore clothes which had seen better days. He also had bad breath, a physical trait that earned him the nickname "The Halitosis Kid" from people in the wrestling business. Needless to say, we weren’t impressed by his appearance. When Pfefer began to talk, however, we were riveted by what he had to say. He told us about his background and, after almost an hour, he made us an offer. "I am going to manage you." He didn’t ask us if we wanted him to manage us. He told us he was going to. "Ve shall be champions and ve shall make bundles." He called money "bundles."

Jackie had heard about Pfefer, so he was interested by what Pfefer offered, which was to handle all our bookings and get us booked all over the country. When Jackie asked me what I thought, I said, "That sounds good to me."

From that day through 1960, we didn’t answer to the promoters who booked us. We answered to one man and one man only — Jack Pfefer.

Pfefer turned out to be one hell of a manager. I’m not talking about a "wrestling manager" who accompanied a wrestler to the ring. I’m talking about a real manager, who took care of business for the wrestlers he had under contract. If you needed someone to take care of your bookings and money, Jack Pfefer was the man you wanted in your corner.

At one time, Pfefer was one of the most powerful men in wrestling, promoting wrestling in New York with fellow promoter Jack Curley. After he was ostracized by his fellow promoters, he tried to destroy the wrestling business by sending results of wrestling matches to Dan Parker, the sport editor for the New York Daily Mirror. That, in itself, was no big deal, but Pfefer reported the results of the matches before they took place. Pro wrestling took it on the chin and gates fell to all-time lows in the wake of the publicity.

Pfefer kept his hand in the wrestling business, though. He aligned himself with other promoters — Al Haft [Columbus], Tony Santos [Boston], Nick Gulas [Nashville], and Fred Kohler [Chicago], in particular — and promoted his own shows in the form of theater. To put it simply, he was a gimmick man. He took plain, ordinary wrestlers and turned them into outlandish, bizarre characters, like the Swedish Angel [Nils Phillip Olofsson], the French Angel [Maurice Tillet], the Zebra Kid [George Bollas], and many others. He had a hand in launching the career of Buddy Rogers and gave him the nickname "Nature Boy." He also helped St. Louis impresario Sam Muchnick promote his first wrestling card on March 27, 1942.

Pfefer also was famous for booking wrestlers and changing their names to sound like the popular performers of the day — Bruno Sanmartino, Cowboy Bill Ellis, Haystack Muldoon, the Fabulous Zangaroos, Lou Kesz, Hobo Brazil, and Ted Blassie, to name just a few. Jackie worked for him in Chicago, once again, as Wildman Fargo. He didn’t necessarily use talented wrestlers, either. I heard him say many times, "I can take any bum I vant off the street and make dem a champion!" A good example took place in the spring of 1951. Pfefer had a falling out with Buddy Rogers, which reportedly had to do with Rogers growing tired of working so many small towns and wanting to go out on his own. I’m sure money had something to do with it, as well. Everything in the wrestling business had to do with money, but Pfefer wasn’t easy to work for, either. He was a real manager who could get the job done, but he was stern and he had rules to which he insisted his charges adhere.

Buddy Rogers sent Sam Muchnick a letter advising him of his break from Pfefer. Muchnick sent the following letter to Pfefer regarding the situation.

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Sam Muchnick Sports Attractions
Suite 230 32, Hotel Claridge
1800 Locust Street.
St. Louis 3, Missouri

April 29, 1951

Dear Jack:
I received the following wire from Buddy Rogers this morning.

Sam Muchnick, Claridge Hotel, St. Louis, Mo.
To: Sam Muchnick, Pres., Alliance members and non members, and Jack Pfefer.
I am now a free agent. I am no longer managed by Pfefer. My break with Pfefer was due to numerous dissatisfactory bookings and constant aggravations. This was not instigated by any Alliance member nor the champion. This is strictly my personal doings and ideas. I remain your friend,
Buddy Rogers

Jack: Thought you would want to know above. Regards.

++++

To get back at Rogers, Pfefer picked up a guy off the street, bleached his hair blond, showed him a few moves, put Buddy Rogers' outfit on him, and called him Bummy Rogers. The guy looked terrible, but Pfefer ran shows featuring Rogers and his other knockoffs and made money.

Promoters had a healthy fear of Pfefer due to his reputation as an "outlaw" promoter. The term we used for the bookers was "manipulators." Pfefer manipulated the manipulators. He threatened everybody, and he wasn't above booking a show in a town on the night before the regular promoter's

show. The only way the promoters could get rid of him was to pay him off. He'd walk into the promoter's office and say, "If you don't do it my fucking vay, I'll fucking run against you."

We lived in Nashville when we were working for Nick. Pfefer hated to fly and he didn't like to be cooped up in a car for long periods of time. He always came to Nashville on the train and he would visit us at the trailer park where we lived. We were happy to see him because he always brought us good news. He would give us our booking schedules, tell us about our transportation arrangements, and, most importantly, brag about how much money we would be making. He always brought presents, too. I don't know why, but most of the time, he brought us clown figurines. I had clowns in every room of my house.

Jack got us booked in New York, Florida, Atlanta, North Carolina, Chicago, Milwaukee, Indianapolis, and Ohio. Everywhere we went, other than New York, I wrestled as "Don Fargo." I kept the "Don Stevens" name in New York since I had worked there under that name for such a long time. We were flying all over the country. We'd wrestle in Chattanooga. Two nights later, we'd make an appearance in Madison Square Garden, and we would be back in Tennessee two days later. In 1958, we spent four weeks in New York, one week in Florida, and three weeks in Atlanta. We'd fly or drive back and forth from Tennessee to Milwaukee, or Chicago.

Pfefer went everywhere Jackie and I did. Trains were very popular then, and since he refused to fly, he'd take a train to wherever we were booked. When Jackie and I got there, he'd be waiting for us.

He had a thick Polish accent. He couldn't pronounce Jack [Jackie], so he called him Jake. He couldn't pronounce Don, either, so I was Den. Jake and Den. When he talked about us to other people, he referred to us as "Jake and Den, mine champions!"

He loved us and he took care of us. His word was his bond. If he said, "Ve are going to Buffalo and you vill get five hundred dollars apiece," we got $500. He always kept his word.

One time, he said, "Ve are going to Chicago. You are going to wrestle der tag team champions." At the time, the champions were Boris and Nicoli Volkoff [John Karney and Steve Gobrokovich]. We walked into the dressing room and sat down while Pfefer took care of business. He came in a few minutes later and said, "You don't take off your clothes, you don't change, you don't do nothing. You get your bags and ve're getting da fuck out of here."

Jackie said, "What's the matter, Jack?"

"Don't worry vat's da matter!"

"Jack, the building's full. There must be ten thousand people out there."

"Don't worry! You're gonna get your money. Get your bags end go!"

We got our bags and went out to our rental car. I said, "Jack, what's the matter?"

"Ve vill not wrestle here!"

"Why, Jack? What's the matter?"

"Dey will not cooperate wid us! They want you sons-of-bitches to do a job. I am not going fer dat! Mine champions do nut do jobs!"

Jackie said, "Jack, we could have made …" whatever it was.

"Don't vorry!"

He pulled a thick wad of bills out of his pocket. He had a roll you would not believe. He peeled off several $100 bills. "Here! Shut your fucking mouths." He paid us and we left. That's the kind of guy he was. He took care of us.

Pfefer hated Gorgeous George. George was a small man by wrestling standards, but he could really wrestle. Jack didn't like George because he wouldn't work for him. So what did Pfefer do? He took a man who had been wrestling in Los Angeles as Darling Danny, dressed him in robes like

the ones worn by George Wagner, and billed him as Gorgeous George Grant. I always thought there was more to the story because the mere mention of Gorgeous George's name sent Pfefer into fits of rage, but if there was, Jack never told us what it was.

On March 12, 1959, George wrestled Whipper Billy Watson in Toronto, Ontario and had his head shaved when he lost the match. For a time after that, his new gimmick was to wear a wig to the ring. When he was introduced in the ring, he surprised everyone by taking it off and revealing his bald head. It was a great attention-getter.

Jackie and I were booked on a card with George in Chicago on October 23, 1959. Early in the afternoon on the day of the match, Pfefer walked into our hotel room with a hat box underneath his arm and said, "Come on, come on, mine people. I've got der gimmick of gimmicks." He opened the box and pulled out two wigs. One was green and one was pink. He said, "Tonight, you vill vear dese vigs in da ring."

George was wrestling Ricki Starr in the main event, so we would be on before him. Pfefer's plan was to upstage George and steal his thunder. I said, "Jack, we can't do this. Man, he's one of us. We don't wanna humiliate him." He got so mad. He screamed and hollered for a long time before storming out.

Two hours later, he came back with two hat boxes. "I got da gimmick. I got da gimmick." He opens the boxes and pulls out two tall, stovepipe hats. He said, "You shall be vearing dem in da ring tonight. Dis vill kill dat bastard."

Jackie and I had to wear stovepipe hats to the ring that night and thousands of people saw us. It was embarrassing. Pfefer also made us wear robes he had personally made. They hung down to our ankles and weighed a ton. They smelled terrible, too, because he kept them in a trunk with mothballs. We felt so stupid, but we wanted to please the old man because he took care of us.

One night, he said, "Ve're gonna go out tonight and have a great dinner in downtown New York." People didn't eat out very often in those days, so Jackie and I were excited. That skinflint took us to a Jewish delicatessen

and ordered pickled herring and bagels. That was his "big dinner" in New York.

Jack didn’t take any money from our paychecks. He got us good guarantees and made his own deal with the promoters. He was an honest person when it came to money. As far as I’m concerned, he did right by us. We made more money on a consistent basis with Pfefer than we ever did anywhere else.

Pfefer came up with great ideas, too. For instance, in the Tennessee territory, when we wrestled in two-out-of-three-fall matches, we went back to the dressing room between falls. In most other territories, we had a one-minute rest period in the ring before continuing with the next fall. I would almost bet Roy Welch and Nick Gulas came up with the idea of returning to the dressing room because they could sell more popcorn and Cokes if the people had a longer break between falls.

One day, Pfefer told us we would be changing our tights and shoes every time we went to the dressing room. He bought us different color tights, all in loud colors or bright patterns. We might come out for the first fall wearing blue tights, shoes and robes. After the first fall, we’d go back to the dressing room and come back out wearing peppermint-striped robes, tights and shoes. Pfefer thought of things nobody else did. Everybody else went back to the dressing room and came back looking sweaty and disheveled. We always looked like we were going to the ring for the first time that night. The people loved it.

We used to drive Pfefer around because he didn’t like to drive. In the winter, when we had the heat on, he’d take off his shoes. His feet smelled so bad. He’d sit and pick his nose with his long fingernails, which must have been an inch long, and then he’d use the same fingers to eat sardines.

When it came to our personal lives, Pfefer was like a mother hen. He didn’t like us messing around with women or going out at night, and he hated the girls who came to the matches looking to make it with one of the wrestlers. The name musicians and other sports figures had for the girls who followed them around was groupies. Truck drivers called them "diesel-eaters" and NASCAR drivers had their "pit lizards." Our girls were known

affectionately as "arena rats." That wasn’t a very nice name, but those girls were fascinated by us. Some of them wanted our autographs, while others just wanted to have their picture made with us. A majority of them, however, had their mind set on going to bed with a wrestler … any wrestler. It didn’t matter how fat, ugly, or stupid a wrestler was. They were always able to find a woman willing to sleep with them. In fact, it wasn’t uncommon for the girls to sleep with two (or more) wrestlers in quick succession.

Every town had its own group of arena rats, and it didn’t matter how secretive we were about our plans. The girls always seemed to know which hotel we would be staying at and where we would be hanging out after the matches. Most of the boys partied with the girls, but there were some who would get serious with them. I got serious with a couple of them, but they were nice girls, just like most of the girls who hung around with the boys. Some of the boys got serious with several at one time. Those who did fell into one of two categories: they either shared with the other boys, or they were labeled "fence builders" and kept the girls for themselves.

I’m not saying every boy did it because there were some who were faithful to their wives, but life on the road was full of temptation and very few could resist the lure of a sexy-looking girl who was willing to do whatever they asked. Some of the wrestlers’ wives and girlfriends didn’t always stay faithful, either. I went to dinner with one of the boys and his girlfriend one night. They were sitting across from me in a booth. While I was eating, I felt her foot slide up my calf and lodge between my legs. I couldn’t do anything without causing a scene, so I pretended like I didn’t notice. I hate to admit this, but even though I acted like I didn’t notice, Mr. Stiffy did. He stood up straight and paid attention.

There was one mother-daughter tag team who hung around the arenas and the hotels in Nashville. One night, the mother walked up and asked, "Do you know where my daughter is?"

I didn’t know, but I told her I’d look to see if I could find her. I did know she had turned down several of the boys who had invited her to their rooms. She simply told them, "Not tonight." I looked for awhile, but she was

nowhere to be found. When I asked one of the boys, they said, "Yeah, we saw her get on the elevator about five minutes ago."

"Where did she go?"

They told me a room number and I went upstairs to find her. The door wasn’t completely closed, so I didn’t bother to knock. The boys almost never knocked. We walked in and out of each others’ rooms all the time, regardless of what someone might be doing. If someone wanted privacy, they closed and locked their door. A door that wasn’t closed all the way was just an invitation for us to walk in. When the door swung back, I saw the girl masturbating on the bed, with one of the midgets, naked, standing over her. I said, "Oops! Excuse me," and turned and walked off. She jumped up and threw on her clothes. I deliberately took my time walking down the hall because I knew what she was going to say. "Wait a minute, Don!"

I looked back at her, grinned, and bolted down the hallway, with her running in hot pursuit. I didn’t bother with the elevator. I took the steps three at a time. She was about 20 feet behind me. "Don’t say nothin’ to my mother!" That was all I heard. I disappeared around a corner and hid before she could see where I went.

I thought that was so funny. She had turned down several big, muscular men to do a midget. Needless to say, I made sure the guys who had made a pass at her (and failed) earlier that night knew about it … and everyone else I could tell, too.

When Pfefer was handling us, we tried to sneak away so we could see the girls. Most of the time, when he found us talking to them, he would storm up and say, "Get away from those pussy-bumpers, you son-of-a-bitches! Dey ain’t nothin’ but fucking trouble!" He’d take his walking cane and hit them lightly with it. "Get out of here, you fucking arena rats!"

Those poor little girls didn’t know what was going on, much less who he was. He didn’t like girls of any age. When little girls came up to us in the arenas and asked for our autographs, he’d say, "Get away, you little ones. Get away little ones." He didn’t want them around. He’d tell us, "You shall not be signing autographs. You shall not be talking to the arena rats."

I’d tell him, "Jack! They aren’t arena rats. They’re little girls. Little kids."

"I don’t care! I don’t want them around!"

He’d tell us, "You guys need to quit eating beans all da time. Your brains are gone from eating too many beans." The first few times he said it, we didn’t know what he meant. We weren’t eating beans. We were making good money, so we were eating steak and good food. Jackie’s curiosity finally got the better of him and he asked, "Jack, why do you keep saying we eat too many beans?"

"You don’t know vhat dat means?" he yelled. "It means you eat too much pussy, you fucking bastard. Stay avay from dose arena rats!"

He would lock us in our hotel room. That was in the days when the doors were locked with something called a "skeleton key," or to be more accurate, a "lever lock key." You couldn’t open the door from either side without a key. One night in Toledo, he said, "You shall not be going novhere. You shall stay here."

He left a case of beer with us and went to his own room. As soon as we heard his door close, we went to the window and looked out. We were on the second floor, so it wasn’t a long drop to the ground. We took the sheets off the bed, tied them together, and tied one end to the radiator. The sheets were long enough for us to hang from the bottom and put our feet on some workhorses that construction workers had left. We climbed down and headed downtown.

We picked up a nice-looking girl in a bar and took her back to the hotel so we could party together. The only way to get back into the room was to climb up the sheets. Jackie went up first and I gave her a boost to get her started. As soon as all three of us were in the room, there was a loud knocking on our door. "Hello, you bastards! Vhat are you doing in dere!"

I said, "We’ve gotta get her out of here."

We pulled up the sheets and tied the loose end around her waist. "We’ll lower you down. When you get down far enough, let us know and we’ll

drop you."

When her feet touched, she yelled, "Okay, I’m down," so we let her go. What she didn’t realize was that her feet had touched the window ledge of the window below, and not the wooden sawhorse. Jackie and I were opening the door to let Pfefer in when we heard a loud crash. When Pfefer left, we looked out the window. The sawhorse was cracked and lying on its side and the girl was gone.

Every single night, before we left the matches, he would say, "You son-of-bitches stay avay from the fucking pussies! Don’t hang around the fucking cunts." And don’t think I’m kidding about locking us in our room. He did it all the time. What he didn’t realize was that it was really easy to get a duplicate key from the hotels. He’d lock us in and we’d beg him, "Please, Jack. Please, please, please. Don’t lock us in tonight." Two minutes after he was gone, we’d use our key to open the door and sneak out.

From May 1957 until June 1958, Jackie and I spent the majority of our time working for Gulas and Welch. We made one shot in Madison Square Garden on May 24, 1958, working with Luis Martinez and Eugenio Marin, and beginning in June, we worked the New York territory for four straight weeks.

J Michael Kenyon, who my editor refers to as the "god of wrestling historians," found the letter which follows. Apparently, Sam Muchnick, the St. Louis promoter, had plans to use Jackie and me, but Nick wasn’t willing to give us up.

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LETTER FROM SAM MUCHNICK:

July 14, 1958. Congratulations on the Fargo Bros. They are very good and stand good in St. Louis. In fact, they were so good last year that I had them ready for a top shot, but Nick [Gulas] had to book them elsewhere and therefore we had to change our plans.

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"Elsewhere" was Florida for four weeks and Atlanta for two weeks, after which time we returned to Nashville.

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Aitken, South Carolina Standard and Review, August 21, 1958

"The Fargos are managed by the internationally known manager Jack Pfefer, the man who makes champions."

Chapter 12
Little Boy Blue

From August 1958 until May 1960, we spent the majority of our time in the Tennessee territory, but Jack had us making regular trips to Chicago and Milwaukee and occasional forays into New York for the Garden shows.

On January 31, 1959, Jackie and I had to stay over after the matches in Chicago because we had to drive to Columbus, Ohio the next day. We met a guy that night named Jay York. Jay was a husky, tall, good-looking kid. He wasn’t a wrestler, but he really wanted to be and he always seemed to be around. We told him we’d be happy to take him with us and introduce him to some people who could help him get into the business. Jackie said, "Look, kid. If you want, you can ride to Columbus with us tomorrow morning. We’ll introduce you to Buddy Rogers."

The kid’s mouth dropped open. "Buddy Rogers?"

"Yeah! We know him well. He can help you out and give you a good gimmick."

"What’s a gimmick?"

We explained and gave him some ideas. "You need something that will make you stand out."

"Like what? Tell me."

"Dye your hair blue. Get a horn."

"Oh, I’ve got a horn. I have an Army bugle."

"That’ll be perfect." We were just rattling ridiculous ideas off the tops of our heads. "Get some short pants, a bow tie, and high knee socks. You can go as Little Boy Blue."

He was all excited. "That sounds great!"

"Meet us here tomorrow morning at ten o’clock and you can go with us."

We thought it was funny, but we didn’t expect him to follow through with it. At nine o’clock the next morning, one hour early, he showed up. His hair was blue, he wore short pants and a bow tie, and had added his own special touch … a little hat. He looked ridiculous, but he looked exactly like I would have pictured Little Boy Blue. We laughed and laughed. Jackie said, "Alright, get in the car."

Jay said, "I need to change clothes."

"No, no. You look fine. Do you have your suitcase?"

"Yeah, I do. I have the horn, too."

"Good. Run and get it and go the way you are. You’ll make a big impression on the wrestlers when we get to Columbus."

It was a 350-mile drive to Columbus. We pumped him up the entire time. "You look great. You’re gonna be fantastic." We must have stopped ten times during the trip. We took him into gas stations and restaurants so people could see him and laugh.

In hindsight, it was a mean rib to play on someone because we knew the boys would make fun of him when we took him into the office. The joke, however, backfired on us. We told him to wait in the car while we talked to Al Haft. When we walked into the office, Buddy Rogers was there. We were laughing when we said, "Hey, Buddy! We’ve got this big kid outside who thinks he’s gonna be a wrestler. We got him dressed like Little Boy Blue."

Buddy had a big cigar in his mouth and was leaning back in a chair. Without smiling or showing any expression whatsoever, he asked, "How big is he, Pally?"

"He’s about six-foot-three."

"How much does he weigh?"

"About two-forty-five, maybe more."

"Bring him in."

We went outside and told Jay to come in with us. He looked so stupid in those short pants and hat, and carrying the bugle. We took him into the office and Rogers looked him over. He asked, "Can ya wrestle, kid?"

He said, "I've never had a match."

Rogers asked him, "Do you know anything about wrestling?"

Jackie and I both opened our mouths to say no, but before we could say anything, Jay said, "Oh, yeah. I worked around Chicago."

We were stunned. More than likely, he was lying, but it also was possible he had worked for some of the outlaw groups in that area. Regardless, he didn't say anything during the trip that would lead us to believe he knew anything about the business.

Rogers had pull. He looked at Al Haft and said, "Let him work in Mansfield tomorrow night. Who's the Great Scott working against in Columbus next Thursday?"

"Don Eagle."

"Cancel that. Put the kid in."

Jackie and I looked at each other and, in unison, said, "What?"

Rogers said, "Yeah. Put him on the card. I like him. He's big, and he looks strong. If he works out, book him in Canton on Saturday. After a coupla weeks, I'll work with him someplace like Marion or Mansfield."

Jay York got his start right there in Columbus working as Little Boy Blue [or Tiny Boy Blue]. We thought he'd be a flop, but when he blew the horn on his way to the ring, the people really got with him. Shortly afterwards,

Rogers changed Jay’s gimmick to "The Alaskan" and he became one of the great characters of professional wrestling. We brought the kid in as a rib, but he made more money in that one week, working with Buddy Rogers, than we did in the whole month.

Rogers had the ability to make just about anyone look good. He knew every move he was going to make and, in turn, every move you were going to make, before you made it. He led Jay York around the ring and made him look like a veteran wrestler.

Yukon Eric [Eric Holmback], who also billed himself as being from Alaska, was another one of the all-time classic characters of our business. I looked up to him. We were wrestling in Milwaukee in the winter of 1959 and it was cold. When Jackie and I pulled up in front of the arena, people were lined up, waiting to buy tickets. Like us, they all were dressed in top coats and wore fur-lined hats. Eric pulled up behind us in a convertible. I don’t know if he really didn’t feel the cold, but I have to say, he always lived his gimmick. When he pulled up in his car that day, he had the top down and wore a flannel shirt with the sleeves cut off. He acted like he didn’t even notice the cold weather. He went to the ring in those clothes, too. He looked every bit the part of a burly lumberjack.

In 1959, Pfefer arranged another booking for Jackie and me with Al Haft. While I was there, I met "Killer" Buddy Austin [Austin Rogers]. We hit it off from the start because we had several things in common. One, Buddy was one of Buddy Rogers’ boys, and two, he had been managed by Bobby Davis for a short time. On several occasions, Austin and I teamed together for a couple of matches in the Columbus territory.

I ran into Buddy Austin again in Baton Rouge in 1966. One afternoon, Buddy and I were both in a diner. I was sitting at the counter and he was in a booth way in the back because we had wrestled each other there a few times and we didn’t want to be seen together. A guy at a table near Buddy kept staring at him. Buddy would look over and stare right back, but the guy never looked away. When the guy finished his meal, he stood up, walked over to Buddy’s booth, and jabbed a fork into Buddy’s arm. Buddy stood up, with the fork still hanging from his arm, and dropped the guy with

a hard jab to the jaw. I don't remember what happened after that, but it was the strangest thing because it all was so spontaneous.

There's a very interesting story about Buddy that began in late 1968 when he was in Australia. He began messing around with a girl he met in a nightclub. Unfortunately, she was the girlfriend of a mob guy. I'm pretty sure Buddy knew that, but he didn't care.

In the early hours of January 1969, during a New Year's Eve party, Buddy and Pedro Morales were having a party at the Crest Hotel in the King's Cross section of Sydney. Buddy was sitting on the bed, talking on the telephone, when some tough-looking guys walked in. They shot Buddy in the stomach with a .22 caliber rifle and cut Morales' face with a broken beer bottle. The two managed to get into the elevator and downstairs. When the police arrived, Morales was slouched against a white marble-tile pillar in the hotel foyer and Austin was stooped forward and clutching his stomach near the front desk. They were taken to St. Vincent's Hospital where Austin underwent emergency surgery for the removal of the bullet.

The injuries were bad enough, but for the wrestling business, the implications were even worse. Buddy and Pedro had been scheduled to wrestle each other in Sydney two nights later. Like most promoters, Jim Barnett had a strict rule that forbade babyfaces and heels from socializing together in public. Barnett, who actually had received anonymous warnings previously about Austin getting involved in things he shouldn't, sent them both home to the States. Morales never went back to Australia, but Buddy returned a short time later. I can't say for sure, but I think Barnett paid Buddy's enemies to leave him alone. He knew Buddy was a good draw in Australia and thought he was well worth the extra expense.

On Wednesday night, March 18, 1959, I had an accident and missed three bookings. At the time, I was just learning to fast draw, like the gunslingers used to do in the Old West. I went out to practice in the woods behind the trailer park where I lived. I set up some beer cans on a fence and backed away about 20 yards. I hit the first beer can, twirled the gun on my forefinger, and put it back into the holster. Dropping my hand to the butt of the gun, I pulled back the hammer and yanked it out of the holster. Unfortunately, the sight hooked on the corner of the holster … just as I

released the hammer. The bullet went into my thigh and exited behind my knee.

I took off my belt, twisted it around my calf muscle as a tourniquet, and sat down. Luckily, my oldest boy, Donnie, was with me. He ran home to tell his mother I needed help. I heard him holler, "Daddy shot himself!" I wasn't the only one who heard it. Everybody in the trailer park must have heard it. We didn't have air conditioning in those days, so everybody had their windows open. The next thing I know, about 40 people came running out to where I sat, each of them thinking I had a mortal wound. My wife was in hysterics. "Oh, god! What the hell did you do now?"

I kept telling her it wasn't bad, but she wouldn't calm down. My only concern was that it would leave a bad scar. In fact, that's what I kept saying. "It's gonna scar, it's gonna scar."

At the doctor's office, the doctor cut my levis away. When he did, he saw a piece of my levis hanging out from the exit wound. When the bullet went in, it had taken the piece with it. He reached down and yanked it out. "Dammit, Doc! That hurt!"

He looked at it and said, "You're lucky. The bullet went through your thigh and below the bone, not into or through it. You'll be fine, but you'll have a stiff leg for awhile."

I said, "You've gotta do somethin'. Can I have pain pills?"

He said, "Not just yet. We'll give you some pain pills later, but first, we have to put your leg in a cast."

Being a typical guy, all I could think about was my job. "A cast? I've gotta go to work. Can you just put it halfway down? I've gotta wrestle tomorrow night."

"You won't be wrestling any time soon."

"I've got to."

He made sure I couldn’t by putting a full cast on my leg. The thing drove me nuts. It itched constantly. I took a straightened coat hanger everywhere I went and fed it down into the cast to scratch my leg whenever it itched. The boys were really nice. They took up a collection for me. Before they could give it to me, though, some son-of-a-bitch stole it. We never found out who it was and I never got any money.

After being laid up for five days, I couldn’t stand it. Jackie and I took a knife and cut it off. I was wrestling the following night.

My first night back in the ring was in Nashville on March 24. Jackie and I wrestled Pat and Freddie Fraley, a father-son team. Pat wrote a song about the incident and gave it to me.

There once was a cowboy by the name of Don Fargo,

Who lives in a trailer park on Dickerson Road,

One day he went into the woods with his gun …

I can’t remember all the lyrics, but it was a great song. It ended with the words, "He wasn’t as fast as he thought he was." Pat actually sang the song on that week’s TV show.

On top of everything else, I got hepatitis. I don’t remember if the cause was the bullet or a dirty needle used by the doctor, but the boys were all pissed at me because they had to get a huge shot so they wouldn’t catch it. I remember one of the boys saying, "Well, here’s another nice mess you’ve gotten me into," which was a popular phrase the great comic actors, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy, used in their films.

In 1959, Tokyo Joe [Phil Sylva] was in the New York territory. There was something not quite right about the guy and he always picked on Mighty Jumbo [Samuel Thomas Hesser]. Jumbo, who was 35 years old at the time, stood more than six-feet tall and claimed to weigh 517 pounds.

On September 21, 1959, after we wrestled in Newark, New Jersey, we were in the bar at the King Edward Hotel in New York City, which was where

most of the boys went at night. Joe was busting Jumbo's chops about something and they got into an argument. Jumbo had to go to the bathroom, which was one floor down next to the kitchen. When Jumbo began to go downstairs, Joe pushed him and sent him tumbling to the bottom, after which Joe ran down the steps after him.

We didn't see what actually happened next, but we did hear a loud scream. Jumbo had stabbed Joe in the stomach with a knife.

Jumbo told the police that Joe came at him with a knife and he wrestled it away from him. In the scuffle, the knife turned and went into Joe's gut. That could be true, but the kitchen was through a door to the left of the stairway and there was a counter with a rack of butcher knives hanging above it. I think Jumbo rolled to his feet, saw Joe barreling down the steps, and grabbed one of those knives.

Joe was taken to the hospital in serious condition and Jumbo was thrown into jail without bond. He appeared before a judge on October 5 and was charged with felonious assault, but I never heard what came of it. They should have just let him go because Joe bullied him all the time and could have killed him when he pushed him down the stairs. It turned out to be good publicity for Jumbo, though, because his picture appeared on the front page of newspapers from Eugene, Oregon to Spartanburg, South Carolina.

Less than two years later, Tokyo Joe was arrested in Amarillo for transporting illegal weapons. On February 24, 1961, he was sentenced to three years in prison, but he was released in early 1963.

At the end of May 1960, I decided to do some traveling on my own and began wrestling in single matches in the Tennessee and Mobile territories.

Chapter 13
The Original Loose Cannon

In 1947, Steve Reeves, the dark horse, came out of nowhere and won the Mr. America contest. Steve stood about six-foot-one and was a handsome, good-looking guy who looked like he was chiseled out of stone.

Another contestant in that contest was Eric Pedersen [Charles Putnam]. Eric had that same chiseled look, but next to Reeves, his skin was very pale. Eric placed second in the contest and won the "most muscular" category. In an interview conducted in 1997, Steve said he "had two tough contest in [his] entire bodybuilding career," one against Eric Pedersen, the Mr. America contest, and the other in the Mr. Universe contest against the legendary Reg Park. That's saying a great deal because Steve Reeves competed against all the greats and won the Mr. America, Mr. Universe, and Mr. World contests.

One day in 2011, I was riding around with my friend, Garry Johnson. He said he never thought he'd be riding around with his idol, Don Fargo. Well, before 1960, I never thought I'd be tag teaming with my idol, Eric Pedersen.

Jack Pfefer was responsible for putting us together. Eric didn't know it when we met, but I worshipped him when I was a young bodybuilder. Eric had been featured on the covers of all the old muscle magazines: Strength and Health, Muscle Power, and Your Physique. Even though I had been a main-event wrestler for more than five years, the time I spent with him really was a thrill to me. And what a performer he was in the ring.

Pfefer got us booked into the New York territory in late September 1960 as the Mr. Americas. During that time, Pfefer also brought Mario Galento and Jerry (Duke) Miller into the territory and billed them as the Dixie Rebels.

I don't know what Pfefer was thinking. There we were, light-skinned and blond hair, and Pfefer booked Eric and me into a hotel in the Puerto Rican

section of town. We stuck out like sore thumbs. As soon as Pfefer left, we checked out and checked into the King Edward Hotel. When Pfefer came to our room to get us that night, we weren't there. Somehow, he found out where we had gone. He came up to our room, banged on the door, and raised hell with us for changing hotels. Eric said, "You can't talk to me like that," and ran towards Pfefer.

Pfefer bolted for the hallway and disappeared into an elevator. Seeing the door closing, Eric ran to the end of the hall and ran down the stairway. I wasn't going to run down the stairway, so I waited for the other elevator to reach our floor. When I reached the lobby, I saw Pfefer running across the street, with Eric on the sidewalk close behind him. There was an island running down the middle of the street with a traffic light mounted at the intersection. Jack made it to the island. Eric was just about to step off the sidewalk when the light changed and the traffic began to move. Seeing Eric was unable to cross, Pfefer put his thumbs in his ears, stuck out his tongue, and wagged his fingers at him. It was like something you'd see in a cartoon. Before the light could change, Pfefer darted across to the far side, hailed a taxi, and got away.

One afternoon, we went to visit Mario at his apartment. Eric had curly, blond hair, and I wanted my hair to look like Eric's, so Mario's wife sent somebody to the drug store to get a product called Toni Home Permanent. Mario's wife applied it to my hair and put my hair up in little rollers. I sat for a long time, waiting for it to dry. The whole time, I was thinking about how great it was going to be to have hair like Eric. All of a sudden, one of the rollers fell out. As I reached up to see if any others were coming loose, several others fell to the ground. The next thing I knew, they were all falling. The scary thing was, not only were the rollers falling out, but my hair was still attached to them. Mario's wife read the directions on the side of the box. Do not apply to bleached hair. I had just bleached my hair the day before. In those days, we used peroxide to bleach our hair, but the chemicals damaged our hair. It stripped the hair of color, but it also damaged the cuticle. My hair fell out in clumps.

When I went to the wrestling office the next day, Toots Mondt gave me a royal chewing-out. "You just ruined a good gimmick."

I said, "It’ll grow back."

He said, "I don’t give a damn about it growing back. If your hair was going to be short, we could have featured you in a gimmick match where the loser got his hair cut off."

Before I met Eric, I found a gimmick. I had a rubber strap that had to be close to an inch thick. It was a demonstration exercise strap that I originally found in the window of a Birmingham, Alabama, sporting goods store. The exercisers made out of springs had been out for some time, but the rubber straps had just come out on the market. The strap I found was about 16 inches long. The strap itself was thick and it had handles affixed to the ends. When I asked a salesman if it was for sale, he said, "No, that’s just for demonstration. Nobody can pull that."

I said, "Well, can I try it?"

He said, "You look pretty strong. I’ll tell you what. If you can pull it, you can have it."

He gave it to me and I tried it. I couldn’t move it. It was impossible. I tried every angle possible. I liked working out with springs because I could take them with me on trips, so I worked out every day in the dressing room, pulling them behind my neck. Every so often, I’d go back to the store and try the strap in the window, but I just couldn’t do it.

One day, I asked if I could try it again. I took it, and BINGO! I stretched it out. I think it surprised me as much as it did the salesman. He said, "It’s all yours."

I worked out with that strap every day and got to where I could stretch it out ten times. Everybody wanted to try it, but nobody could budge it.

When I tagged up with Eric, he had washboard abs. They were like rocks. He issued a standing challenge to any member of the audience who could punch him in the stomach and move him from the spot where he stood. He could stand up straight, psyche himself up, brace himself, and let someone hit him in the stomach with a straight-on punch. He didn’t allow side

punches, but they could hit him as hard as they wanted. A couple of guys made him rock a little, but they couldn’t budge him from where he stood. When he did the act, he shut his eyes. It was as if he was in a trance. I thought, "Man, that is one hell of a gimmick."

I knew nobody could pull my strap, and I knew nobody could move Eric, so I talked to Toots Mondt about it. He was always ready for gimmicks. I said, "Why don’t you put up a thousand dollars to anybody that can pull my strap and budge Eric? They have to do ‘em both."

He said, "I don’t think they should do both. Let ‘em pick which one they wanna do."

We had a lot of people challenge both of us, but nobody was successful. I had big truck drivers and weightlifters try the strap. They couldn’t do it. They tried to cheat by pushing it up over their heads, or bringing it out front. "No, no. You have to pull it behind your neck."

One night in Flint, Michigan, three guys lined up to punch Eric in the stomach. The first two guys took turns hitting him and had no luck. Then a third guy, a man named Billy Tytar, came into the ring.

Eric always used to tell me, "You need to stand by me and watch. If anybody tries to sucker me, you clip ‘em."

Eric got into position and gave a nod, signifying his readiness. When Tytar hit him, he threw his whole body into him, like a shoulder block, and pushed him backwards. Eric yelled, "The guy twisted!"

I grabbed the guy. When he tried to pull away, I shoved him into the turnbuckle. He began to holler, "I want my money! I want my money!" People were booing. "I want my money." He made more of an ass out of himself than anything. I took the ring mic and told the people in the audience, "He didn’t hit him with his fist. He used his shoulder." Even though we were heels, I got the people on my side. That proved what Buddy Rogers taught me. If you do things correctly, you can twist the people’s emotions in any direction you want. Tytar tried to cheat and the people knew it.

Tytar took his case to court, as evidenced by the newspaper report below. The article is wrong about the amount offered being $2,000. It was a thousand.

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Flint [MI] Journal, Saturday, December 3, 1960

A legal battle was seen shaping up Friday night. The two "Mr. Americas" were served with papers notifying them that a suit for $2,000 has been filed in Genesee County Circuit Court by one Billy Tytar, of Flint, who says he is entitled to the $2,000 offered by the blond wrestlers to anyone who can move them with a punch in the breadbasket.
Tytar was one of about 20 who tried – and there is a dispute as to whether he moved the man with a punch or with a shoulder block. The suit was started by summons, and will be heard by Circuit Judge Donn D. Parker at a later date.

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They awarded the case to Eric and me because we had witnesses who testified Tytar had twisted and put his whole body into the punch.

Two years later, I took the strap to Amarillo when I went there as Jack Dalton. A wrestler who called himself Mr. Kleen [Ernie Bemis] was a big card there. He looked and dressed like the Mr. Clean character from the Procter & Gamble cleaning solution of the same name. He did a strongman gimmick. I have to give it to him. He was strong. Dory Funk Sr. [Dorrance Wilhelm Funk], who promoted the Amarillo territory, was a big ribber. He was a shooter, but he loved to have fun. He was better than most of us when it came to ribs.

I don’t think Funk was too keen on either Mr. Kleen or his gimmick. Mr. Kleen was supposed to be the strong man. One day, when he was standing in the middle of the ring, Funk walked out and threw my strap over the ropes and into the middle of the ring. "There. Pull that!"

What could Mr. Kleen do? He was on live television. He picked it up and tried it, but he couldn’t pull it. He was so embarrassed. He left the ring and stormed back the dressing room. He didn’t say a word. He was so mad. That was a dirty rib, but he was supposed to be a strongman. Funk tried to rub salt into the wound by saying, "Take the strap out to the ring, Fargo, and pull it a few times."

I wouldn’t do it. I said, "No, man. Are you trying to get me in a fight or something?"

A few years later, I was supposed to wrestle Mr. Kleen in Baton Rouge. I told a referee to take a message to Mr. Kleen in the other dressing room. "Tell him to hit me as hard as he can and make me bleed. Then I’ll nail him. Let me know what he says."

The referee said, "Yeah, he said you can hit him."

I said, "Okay."

A few minutes into the match, he busted my eyebrow open and I began to bleed. I said, "Okay, it’s my turn now."

When I backed him into the corner, I tried to hit him, but when I did, he blocked me. He said, "If you hit me, Fargo, I’ll embarrass you in front of everybody."

That really pissed me off. I told him, "You ain’t gonna embarrass me. I’m gonna bust you the hard way." I wanted to hit him so badly, but whenever I did, he blocked me, or moved his head. He finally left the ring. We thought he was going to walk around a bit and then get back into the ring. Instead, he went back to the dressing room. The referee didn’t have any choice other than to count him out. When I got back to the dressing room, the other guys said he stormed in, grabbed his gear, and walked out. He left the territory the next day without giving notice.

I hate to talk badly about Eric. He was a nice guy and he had a great gimmick, but he had a bad attitude. He had a good heart and he meant well, but you just couldn’t get close to him and he was very moody. There were

times he would get mad at me. We'd get into the ring and begin posing. Like with everything I do, I'd get carried away and keep on posing, while he was ready to go to the corner and wait for the bell to signal the start of the match. "Dammit! Stop already, you dumb son-of-a-bitch! Stop trying to outshine me!" For a long time, I thought he was ribbing, but he meant it.

I can't tell you the number of times we be somewhere and he'd say, "I'll be back in a minute," and he'd disappear. We were sitting in the movie theater one afternoon. "I'm gonna get some popcorn." Two days passed before I saw him again.

I developed a bit of an attitude when I was around Eric because his bad outlook was contagious. Eric came to me before a show one night and said, "They didn't pay us as much as we should have been paid. We need to talk with Jack and ask for our fuckin' money before we go on."

I said, "I don't know."

I was a little leery about rocking the boat because we had a good deal going, but Eric wasn't going to take no for an answer. He went to Pfefer and said, "Either they give us our money now or we're not wrestling."

"I'll make sure you get it. I should collect your money. Don't vorry about it."

No, we want it now."

They probably would have given it to us, but Pfefer wasn't going to ask. He lost his cool. "No, you meat-head sons-of-bitches. I collect the fucking money. I'm not going to ask for it and you are going to go out and earn it."

Thinking we would do as he wanted, Pfefer walked away. I looked at Eric and asked, "So what do we do now?"

"Fuck them. Let's go."

We picked up our bags and walked out of the arena … right through the crowd. We got booed like nobody's business. The problem was, we left a

big payday behind and we didn’t have a pot to piss in between the two of us. I couldn’t believe it when Eric asked, "What are we gonna do now?"

I wasn’t sure, but we called promoters and got ourselves booked in different territories. For the next month, we were like two gypsies, traveling around from one part of the country to the other. We spent some of that time in Tennessee, with him living with me in my house trailer.

While we were in Memphis, Eric had problems with Buddy Fuller [Edward Welch], the promoter. I tried to make peace between the two of them because I wanted to keep the team together. They decided to meet at a restaurant and talk out their problems. When we got there, Eric said, "I’d rather talk to him in private, rather than in a public place. Tell him I’ll wait for him in the alley here."

"Okay."

I went inside and told Buddy, "Eric wants to talk to you."

"Where’s he at?"

"He’s in the alley."

Buddy didn’t want to do it. "Nah. If he wants to talk to me, tell him he can come in here."

When I went back outside to find Eric and walked down the alley, I saw a movement behind a dumpster on my left. It was Eric … waiting with a brick in his hand to "talk" to Buddy. I liked Buddy. He always used and paid me well. I went back inside and told him, "Don’t go out into the alley. I think it would be better if you just went home."

When he asked me why, I said, "He’s laying for you."

All Buddy said was, "That son-of-a-bitch."

Buddy did the right thing and left. That was the end of Eric and me as a team. The next day, Eric disappeared.

Eric was a very strange person. In fact, he was the "Loose Cannon" before Brian Pillman was even born. I don’t know how true the story is, but I had heard that when Eric was just breaking into the business, Ed "Strangler" Lewis got so mad at him during a trip one day that he chased him around a car. Of all the people in the world I wouldn’t want mad at me, Strangler Lewis would rate high on the top of that list.

Eric and I always got along, but he didn’t like too many people, which was the opposite of me. I liked everybody, even the guys that didn’t like me.

Chapter 14
The Kid with the Long Hair

Less than a month after Eric disappeared, I left Tennessee for Pittsburgh. From what I remember, the territory was just opening up. Jackie was supposed to go with me, but he changed his mind at the last minute. On February 18, after wrestling on the Channel 11 studio wrestling show in Pittsburgh, I wrestled Pancho Rodrigues in Ford City. I returned to Nashville for a February 21 shot in the Hippodrome Arena with Jackie as my partner against Lester Welch and Joe Scarpa, but from there, I returned to Pittsburgh and stayed for almost nine months.

The boys in Pittsburgh had heard about "Don Fargo" coming in, but they didn't know who it was because they didn't know I wrestled under that name. They couldn't believe it when the former "Don Kalt" walked into the dressing room.

I worked in both singles and tag team matches while I was there. At the TV tapings one day, Toots Mondt [the promoter] said he didn't know what they were going to do because they had counted on Jackie coming in as my partner. I said, "How about that kid with the long hair sittin' over there."

The "kid with the long hair" was Jim Baugus, who began wrestling in the territory in April as Jimmy Dykes. [not to be confused with J.C. Dykes, the manager] In the promos, they billed him as "The Madman from Chicago." Jim would travel from town to town with his suitcase, hoping to take the place of somebody who didn't show up. He was a good-looking young boy and I had seen him wrestle. That kid could take bumps. I thought, "Oh, boy! Oh, boy! Now I can be Jackie and he [Baugus] can be me." That was the first thought that crossed my mind.

Jim was excited about the prospect of teaming with me. Just as Jackie and I had done several years previously, we bought matching outfits.

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Monessen Valley PA Independent – April 25, 1961

"HEADS MAT SHOW — Colorful wrestler Don Fargo [seated] is shown above signing contract with members of Holy Name Society of Blessed Virgin Mary R.C. Church of Donora to insure his appearance at mat show Saturday, May 6 at the Mon Valley Catholic High gym."

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One night, a childhood friend named Jackie Newman came to the Civic Arena to see me. He told one of the ushers that he was there to see "Don Kalt." When the guy told him he didn't know who he was talking about, Newman said, "That Fargo guy." Of course, the usher knew who he was talking about then. He came to the back and told me somebody wanted to see me. When I walked up to him, he said, "Do you remember me?"

It took a few seconds before I placed him. "Oh, yeah. Jackie Newman. How you doin'? I ain't seen you in a long time." I was thrilled that he came to see me. After all, I was a big star.

Then he said, "I'm doing fine. Hey, I was wondering. Do you have that thirty-two dollars you owe me?"

"What?"

"You remember. I sold you a set of weights for thirty-two dollars."

I said, "I have some business to take care of. See me after the matches are over and I'll take care of you."

I went to the back and told Jim, "I'm in a bit of a rush to get home tonight. Have your stuff ready to go. We're gonna leave as soon as our match is over."

We didn't even bother to shower after our match. We walked into the dressing room, picked up our suitcases, and went out the back door.

In August 1961, I called Jackie to see if he would give me permission to change Jim’s name to Ronnie Fargo. Calling Jackie to get his blessing was something I always did when I wanted to have someone else "borrow" the Fargo name. After all, he had been a Fargo before anyone else, so I felt he had the right to say yay or nay. Jackie said he didn’t mind. Granted, he wouldn’t have liked it if we had been going to Tennessee, but I understood his feelings on that.

Jim and I were on TV in Pittsburgh one day. I was bragging about how we could beat Bruno Sammartino, Haystack Calhoun, Sailor Art Thomas, and any other wrestler we could think of. Jim broke in and said, "Yeah. In fact, we can beat anybody in Pittsburgh."

That was the worst thing he could have said. He had issued an open invitation to every street fighter in Pittsburgh. Afterwards, I told him, "You dumb son-of-a-bitch. We can’t beat anybody in Pittsburgh. We can beat the wrestlers. You’re supposed to say "the wrestlers" in Pittsburgh, not every Tom, Dick and Harry."

When I wrestled in Pittsburgh, I lived in a little town called Ingram. Everybody there knew me as Don Kalt. A few nights later, after wrestling somewhere, we drove to Ingram and stopped at a diner to get some coffee. It was a little after midnight when we got there. We were both dressed alike and we had blond hair, which always drew attention … most of which was unwanted. We sat at the end of the counter and ordered coffee. We hadn’t been there long enough for our butts to warm the seats before we heard, "Hey, you blond faggots!"

I looked over at a guy sitting in one of the booths and asked, "What?"

"Yeah, I’m talkin’ to you, you queer-lookin’ faggot."

I didn’t want any trouble, but you could tell when a guy wasn’t going to just shut up and let it go. "What’s your problem, man? Do you wanna go outside and talk about it?"

"Yeah."

I was the first one outside. When I stepped out onto the sidewalk, a girl grabbed my arms and said, "Please don’t hurt him. You’re a wrestler. You’ll hurt him."

Before I could answer, the guy hit me with a hard jab on my nose. I fell backwards off the curb and into a car. I didn’t fall to the ground, but I was off balance. Blood poured from my nose and stars glittered in my vision. He had a shocked look of puzzlement on his face, which I later learned was because everybody he hit went down with the first punch. Even the guys with him looked like they couldn’t believe it. He just stood there when I charged him. I hooked his arm and threw a punch into his face … but I pulled it, just like I would have if I had been in the ring. I don’t know what I was thinking. I knew I wasn’t in the ring, but it just happened too quickly and the punch felt so natural. When I realized what I had done, I said, "Fuck this," and pushed him backwards into a car. His head snapped backwards and he fell to the ground. I grabbed him by the throat and choked him. It was like I was possessed. His friends came over and tried to pull me off. One guy wrapped his hands around my face, put his fingers in my mouth, and pulled back. He screamed when I clamped down on his fingers. Somebody was trying to tear out one of my eyeballs, while somebody else was hitting me with something I took to be a blackjack. When I managed to throw them off and back away, I looked over to see Jim, my partner, leaning against the wall of the diner … signing autographs for the girls who were with the guys.

The cops showed up and arrested us both. We were taken to something they called the "Justice of the Peace" and we were fined $25 for disorderly conduct. He didn’t have any money with him, so they said they were going to take him to jail. I stepped in and said, "No, I’ll pay his fine." That took some of the steam out of the guy and he thanked me.

When we all got back to the diner, he walked up, shook my hand, and said, "We’ve gotta do that again."

I said, "Well, anytime you fucking want to. We can do it now and go back to jail if you want."

He laughed and said, "No, that’s alright."

The next day, his friends spread the word to everyone they knew that he had kicked my ass. Over time, people heard the true story from other people who were there. He was well known, so the false story continued to travel around for awhile and I had one street fighter after another come up to talk to me. They said they didn’t want to cause me any trouble. They just wanted to see what I looked like. I had a bad feeling about it, though, and I decided it might be a good time for Jim and me to leave and go someplace else until things cooled down.

After working out our bookings, the tag team known as "Donnie and Ronnie Fargo" drove quietly out of town … never to be heard from again.

Chapter 15
Wheelchairs and Crutches

When Jim and I left Pittsburgh, we were dead broke. We didn’t have a place to go and we didn’t have any leads, so I said "Let’s go to Nashville and see if Nick Gulas can use us." Unfortunately, Nick said they didn’t have a place for us. We didn’t have any idea of what we would do next.

We went back to Pittsburgh and met "Spider" Al Galento. Jim and I thought having Al as our manager would a little heat to the Fargo gimmick, so the three of us got together to brainstorm. I began to throw off names of big cities. When I said, "Houston," Al said, "That’s it. I have a phone number for Morris Sigel, the promoter there."

I called Mr. Sigel and told him I had a partner, and that we would like to come into Texas with Al Galento as our manager. He said, "That sounds good. We need some new faces here. When can you start?"

He gave us a starting date and asked us to come in a few days early to do promos and get things set up. Jim had to take care of some things before he went, so I went in by myself.

We planned to go in as Donnie and Ronnie Fargo. Before I left, Jim, Al and I went to a professional photographer to have some pictures made and I took them with me so Morris Sigel could use them for publicity. I had real long, blond hair and I was clean cut and clean shaven. When I met with Morris, though, he told me he was looking for something else. "I like the pictures and your gimmick. You have a good thing there, but there are too many blond babyfaces in the business. I like the Fargo name, too, but I need a good heel team."

"What do you want us to do?" I asked.

"Come up with an idea for anything but a blond babyface team."

I said, "If you'll give me some time, I can come up with some ideas."

"You have to come up with something quick. I have the three of you booked Monday night in Fort Worth."

I promised him I'd have something by the weekend.

When I got back to the motel where we were living, I explained the situation to Joanne. "I've gotta change my gimmick."

She didn't hesitate for a second. "You like cowboys so much. Why don't you go as a cowboy?"

"Yeah! That's a great idea." I didn't even have to think about it. I knew that would be perfect, especially for Texas audiences.

I didn't realize it at first, but Joanne and I were thinking along two different lines. When she said "cowboy," she meant "good guys" like Roy Rogers or Gene Autry, but the first thing that went through my mind was Jesse James or Billy the Kid. I said, "We could be the James Gang." She looked at me with a puzzled look on her face, but then she grinned. "How about the Daltons?"

When she said that, I thought, "The Dirty Daltons." There was no question in my mind. The Dirty Daltons was the gimmick for us.

When I was a kid, I had dreamed about being a cowboy. To be more specific, I wanted to be a gunslinger. I was a big fan of TV westerns and watched The Rebel, Maverick, Cheyenne, and Bat Masterson whenever I wasn't on the road. I remember watching one show where two gunslingers faced off against each other in a small western town. The guy in the white hat drew his gun, shot his adversary, spun the gun on his finger, threw it in the air, caught it as it came down, and slid it back into his holster. I shouted out loud, "Wow! That was cool."

One night, I took one of my guns and practiced twirling it. I didn't do much more than spin it around on my finger, but in time, I would begin to learn some of the more advanced tricks. I practiced in my back yard every day.

By the time I pulled into Houston, I had become pretty proficient with them.

Since Morris Sigel thought there were too many blonds in the business, I had my wife groom my hair and dye it a dark red color and I let my moustache grow. When Jim came in, I told him about the gimmick. He loved the idea and got the same grooming treatment. We didn't look like the Dirty Daltons, though. We were too clean cut. At first, our ring attire was very basic. We didn't wear cowboy clothes. I wore a simple, short-cut jacket and strapped my guns around my waist. Jim wore an outfit that made him look like a big-time western gambler. Al Galento bought a derby hat and vest. We looked pretty good. Later, we went out and bought full-fledged cowboy outfits. I already had holsters and guns. In fact, I always had a lot of guns. I loaned Jim a gun and holster and we wore them everywhere we went. Jim liked it so much that he began gun twirling with me.

When we walked into the wrestling office, Morris had a huge smile on his face. He loved the gimmick. "Yeah. That's great. Great, great! I love the way you dress alike, too."

Paul Boesch, the TV commentator, also loved the idea. He did the TV promos for all the towns. If Paul didn't like you, you wouldn't get over, because Paul was the man on the mike. He could make you or break you. He was very instrumental in helping us get our gimmick over because he really pushed us. When I walked out onto the set, he asked me a few questions. He didn't call me by my first name. He just asked, "So you're one of the Dalton brothers?"

I said, "That's right. My name is Jack … Jack Dalton. My brother, Jim Dalton, is on his way here from where we live in Cass County, Missouri. He'll be here soon and we're going to make a name for ourselves here." I'm sure I threw in a lot of other "facts" about our backgrounds, but I couldn't tell you what they were.

Not only did I have to think about what I was going to say, but I had to think about how I said it. For the past five years, I had talked like a Yankee from New York. I wasn't sure where the Dalton Gang hailed from, but I

was pretty sure it wasn’t the northeastern section of the United States. Having spent more than three years in Nashville, I had picked up a bit of a Southern accent, so it wasn’t too hard to make the change.

When I ran out of things to say, Paul was right there to prompt me for additional information. "Are you really kin to the famous Dalton Gang

"Yes, sir. My great, great, granddaddy was Bob Dalton. He was shot dead by a crooked sheriff after he made a small withdrawal from a bank in Coffeyville, Kansas."

Paul asked me, "Why do you have the guns strapped to your sides?"

Everything we did during that first few minutes was impromptu. We had planned nothing ahead of time. I said, "I thought I’d wear them and show you some tricks."

He said, "Let’s see one. Do a fast draw."

I just stood there for a few seconds, until he finally raised his eyebrows as if to say, "Well?"

I said, "Do you wanna see it again?"

He liked that and laughed. Playing right along, he said, "Okay. Now do something else."

I flipped the gun up into the air and twirled it around behind my shoulder, behind my back, and back into my holster. He said, "Wow, that’s pretty impressive."

"Yeah, I think I’m the best there is." That was probably the worst thing I could have said, but I’ll explain that in a bit.

Morris Sigel loved it, too. Afterwards, he said, "That was great. We’ve never seen anything like that. You guys have to do something with that."

It really made me feel good to hear him say that. I said, "Okay, I’ll come up with some other ideas."

Beginning the week of November 13, 1961, Jim and I began traveling to all the towns in the territory. Morris Sigel booked the towns through his Texas Wrestling Agency company, but each town had a front promoter. The territory was laid out as follows, with the promoters in brackets:

Monday: Fort Worth [R.G. McElyea]
Tuesday: Dallas [Ed McLemore] and Austin [Leo Garibaldi]
Wednesday: San Antonio [Frank Brown] and Lake Charles, Louisiana [Cecil McDonald]
Thursday: Galveston [Sammy Green] and Corpus Christi [Cowboy Clements]
Friday: Houston [Morris Sigel]
Saturday: Angleton, Beaumont [Johnny Galiano]

Also on Monday nights, a man named Dick Clark fronted Waco for Dick Raines, who was the actual promoter behind the scenes.

Morris Sigel told me, "If you get over in Dallas, you're over everywhere in Texas." We went to Dallas and got over.

On November 13, the first night we wrestled in Fort Worth, we wrestled twice. I won the first match again Johnny Kostas, Jim beat Sam Steamboat, and the four of us came back in the main event tag team match. We were billed as the world tag team champions.

I hate to admit it, but I used to do a lot of complaining. One day, Al, Jim and I went to wrestle at the Veteran's Hospital in Houston. The place was packed with wounded soldiers. They were in wheelchairs and on crutches. Some were missing legs, or arms, or a combination of both. The worst were what they called the "basket cases" — those who had no arms or legs. I had never seen anything like it.

They screamed and hollered at us as we walked to the ring. Al really riled them up when he hollered back and shook his cane at them. When the ring announcer introduced us, they booed and yelled. It was hard to stay in character. I looked out over the audience and sneered at them, but I thought to myself, "I don't have a care in the world compared to these poor guys." It really humbled me, and I did a lot of thinking when I went home that night.

I couldn’t believe how much energy they had, and how they seemed to be enjoying themselves. I thought, "How can someone who is missing an arm, or a leg, look so at peace with their lot?"

We got a lot of heat in that match. Guys in wheelchairs propelled themselves down the aisle in an attempt to reach Galento. Others came to the ring on crutches. I could tell by their expressions that they wanted to get their hands on him and take him apart. When the match was over, he must have had ten guys on crutches chase him back to the dressing room. In some ways, it was funny, but it really wasn’t. I have to give Al a lot of credit for his contribution to our gimmick. As a manager, he was a heat magnet. He was so good at what he did.

The memory of our time there stuck with me for a long time. I still complained, but whenever I did, I always remembered the people in that hospital.

One night after we finished wrestling, one of the ushers came into the dressing room and said, "Jack, there’s a coupla guys out there that want to talk to you."

I said, "Tell ‘em I’ll be out when I finish changing. Do you know what they want?"

"No. They just said they wanted to talk to you. They’re wearing guns."

That didn’t worry me because a lot of people carried guns openly in those days, but I was curious as to what they wanted because we didn’t know anyone in Fort Worth. When I went out, they introduced themselves and one of them said, "We watched you do the tricks with your gun on TV. The tricks were pretty good, but we never saw you draw. Watch this."

Before I knew what he was going to do, he pulled his gun out of the holster and spun it all over the place. He did things I had never seen before and didn’t think possible. He spun the gun around his index finger and literally threw it back into the holster. I stood there with my mouth hanging open like an imbecile. When I regained my composure, I said, "Damn! What a gun. Let me look at that."

I was as impressed by his gun as much as what he did with it. It was a light, balanced, custom-made, fast-draw gun. I looked at his holster. It was all metal and had nice leather on it. I reached out and hit it. It didn’t move.

The next thing I knew, his friend pulled out his gun and did some more fancy tricks. All I could do was stand there and shake my head from side to side.

Looking down at their feet, I saw a mechanical contraption on the floor. "What’s that thing?" I asked.

"That’s a timer."

"What’s that for?"

I was digging myself deeper and deeper into the well of stupidity. My questions revealed my near-total ignorance of what fast-draw, gun-twirling was all about. He grinned and said, "To see how fast you are. We came down here to challenge you."

I said, "I don’t think so. Nah. You guys don’t wanna mess with me." And I walked away.

During the next couple of weeks, they kept bugging me. They’d show up at the arenas and stand near the dressing room door, so I couldn’t help but see them when I finished my match. Then they began to call me.

Now, I’m sure you’re wondering how they got my telephone number. Obviously, they didn’t look up "Jack Dalton" in the phone book. Like an idiot, I gave it to them the first time we met … before they told me they wanted to challenge me. I have to admit, I was sort of intrigued. They persisted, saying things like, "We’d like to call you and talk about gunfighting," and "We’d like to invite you to join us."

Jim didn’t pay too much attention to them. At that time, he wasn’t really into the gunfighting gimmick very much. I finally gave in and met with the guy. His name was Joe Bowman. He and his wife were both gunfighters and they were both fast draws. They owned custom-made .22 pistols.

The first time I went to their house, they were there with a couple of other gunfighters. They talked to me and showed me their guns, holsters, and everything that went along with the sport. They were really serious about their hobby. They said, "We hold contests every Saturday in our backyard. We shoot bottles and have fast-draw contests. Would you like to try yourself against the timer?"

I had no idea what he wanted me to do, but he really put me at ease. He didn't talk to me condescendingly. I said, "I don't know how that timer works."

He said, "Well, you stand next to this box, hold the button down with your finger, and when the light in front of you goes on, draw and fire."

"That sounds simple. Yeah. I'll try it."

That timer measured in increments of one one-hundredth of a second. That's fast. I pushed down the button, waited for the light … and drew! The timer showed 8.7 tenths of a second. I was so proud of myself. When we had talked in the days prior to the get-together, I had bragged to Joe about how fast I was. I was so relieved to know that I had lived up to what I had said. I turned around and looked at my host, thinking how impressed he must be. Joe looked back at me and gave me a broad smile. He stood up and said, "Wow! That was good. Let me see if I can get close to your speed."

POW! Five tenths of a second. FIVE!

I was totally freaked out. When I looked around, everybody was grinning. They had me. They knew right then and there that I wasn't a fast-draw man. I was humiliated. I thanked them for giving me the opportunity to shoot, told them I'd see them around, and left.

I thought that would be the last I would see of them, but they kept coming to the matches. They brought more of their friends, too. At first, Jim and I were intimidated, but we quickly realized they just wanted us to join their group. Finally, one Saturday morning, we went over to Joe's house and began to practice with them. They showed us different methods of twirling, and fast-draw techniques. On Sundays and during the week, Jim and I spent

every spare second we had practicing what we had learned on Saturday. Through our relationship with Joe and his wife, and the time we spent at his house, Jim and I met a lot of gunfighters, and they, in turn, began to come to the matches.

Each Saturday, my wife, my boy Donnie, and I went to Joe’s. Donnie had his own gun. I bought him a .22 pistol and holster. He looked so cool with those guns strapped to his sides. Joe told me where I could have metal-lined holsters made, and how to get guns modified with built-up hammers and cut-away trigger guards. I bought everything I could find relating to gunfighting. We dressed up in period costumes, too. I have home movies of one guy who dressed like a Confederate soldier. He had the uniform, a hat with the feathers, and a sword.

We’d draw and fire blanks. Actually, we fired black gunpowder with a piece of cardstock paper packed on top of it. We’d put a balloon in a box and fire at it. I got to be pretty good. Every time I did it, I’d shoot and spin the pistol back into my holster. Of course, every now and then, I had to do the Fargo strut after I holstered my gun. The guys all loved that.

One day, I told a guy, "I’m gonna try some live ammo."

"Aw, man. You haven’t got the holster for that."

"What do you mean?"

He said, "You’ve got a metal-lined, fast-draw holster, but the one you have is a metal-lined, fast-draw holster for blanks. It’s not for twirling. You need a metal-lined holster with a boot."

What I didn’t know was, if the gun accidentally fires in a holster with a boot, the bullet will ricochet to the ground. If you were using a regular holster, the bullet would probably go through the holster and wind up in your foot (or through your knee, which is what I experienced in Nashville). I bought the holster I needed and practiced with blanks.

When I felt comfortable using the new holster, I decided to try live ammunition. I put a bottle on the fence post, walked back, took aim, and

fanned the hammer. POW! CRACK! I knocked the top off the bottle. I twirled the gun back into the holster. I drew and fired again. The bottom half of the bottle shattered into small pieces. Once again, I twirled the gun and dropped it back into the holster. One of the guys said, "Wow! That was great! Do it again."

I said, "Nope. It’s all on film. Let’s leave it at that."

The truth is, I don’t think I could have done it again, and I wasn’t about to try. I knew Lady Luck had been on my side and I wasn’t going to tempt fate. That was live ammo, and I was fanning. The chances of me doing it a second time was slim to none.

Before I move on, I have to credit Don Leo Jonathan for being the person who first introduced me to gun twirling. He came to the matches one night wearing a gun holster and he gave a demonstration to the boys on how to twirl. I was fascinated and told myself, "I’ve gotta have one of those," but I never dreamed that, years later, I would become so heavily involved with gun twirling and shooting.

As time went by, Jim and I expanded and refined our Dalton gimmick. I let my hair go back to its natural color, grew a moustache, started wearing overalls, and wore my guns across my chest. They weren’t fast-draw guns, but we looked the part. We looked like we had just walked out of the Old West. Spider Galento looked so good in his outfit that his appearance took our gimmick to a whole new level.

We also shot our guns in the ring. Instead of the cardstock paper, we’d pack toilet paper into the shell casing. When we fired, the toilet paper would catch on fire and sparks would fly up into the air.

If I wasn’t wrestling or practicing my fast draw, I was looking for ideas that would enhance our gimmick. Wrestlers today dress differently than we did then. If you were on top, or if you were somebody, like Buddy Rogers was, you wore a nice suit to the arena. Jackie and I always wore exactly the same thing, even down to our underwear. Our socks matched, too. We were the Fabulous Fargos from top to bottom. When Jim Baugus and I were the Daltons, I got cowboy books and looked through them for ideas. I couldn’t

read, but I looked at the pictures. I saw how they dressed in the Old West. I watched old TV westerns, thinking I'd get ideas there, but they didn't look the part, especially when I compared their style of dress to what I saw in books. I wanted us to look authentic.

At first, we dressed in nice western outfits, but it struck me one day that the Daltons were outlaws. They spent a lot, if not all, of their time on the trail, so they would be dirty. I bought frock coats, turned-down cowboy hats, and mule boots that came all the way to our knees. We wore studded cuffs, chaps, spurs, and scarves around our necks. Wrestlers were celebrities in those days. We were like Hollywood stars are today. When people saw us, they knew without a doubt that we were the Dirty Daltons.

Jim was such a good partner because he never argued when I suggested we try something new that I had seen. One time, we were walking past a western store and saw complete buckskin outfits in the window. They cost $100 apiece, but they looked so good. We went in and we both bought a set. When we showed up at the Houston Coliseum that night, Morris was amazed. He thought we looked just great. What amazed him even more was that we showed up so often wearing different outfits. I never wanted our gimmick to get stale, so I tried to change our look as often as possible.

I owned a lot of guns. In fact, I always owned a lot of guns. We carried pearl-handled six-shooters on our hips and Winchester rifles in our hands. In those days, you could walk around town wearing gun belts, and there weren't many restrictions on where you could carry sidearms. We didn't wear them into the bank, but we wore them everywhere else. We wore them in restaurants and grocery stores. Young people will have a hard time believing this, but it's true. We even wore them when we boarded airplanes. Kids today will think I'm kidding, but I'm not. They didn't have security checks or x-ray machines and you could take just about anything you wanted on the flight. The flight attendants (which were called stewardesses in those days, before the PC crowd began to implement their idiotic ideas of feminism) made us secure our rifles up front during the flight, but we were allowed to carry them in the airports and onto the plane. They didn't say anything about our handguns.

Years later, when Jim and I began wrestling in the Mobile territory, Cowboy Bob Kelly told me that the chief of police asked him, "Who are these guys you have on TV called the Daltons? They're running around town wearing guns."

Kelly told him, "They're all right. They're the Dirty Daltons. They don't mean any harm. They just want people to see them."

When I saw Clint Eastwood's first spaghetti western, A Fistful of Dollars, in 1964, I just had to get one of the Mexican serapes he wore. I couldn't find any place to buy one, so I bought two long Mexican rugs with tassels around the edges and cut holes in the center of them. My wife sewed the edges so they wouldn't come unraveled and we put them over our heads. They looked almost exactly like the serapes Clint Eastwood wore.

During one of our runs in Texas, Jim and I promoted a fast-draw contest at a local mall. We had more than 100 shooters enter. We held several events, including the fast draw and the walk-draw, where two guys walked towards each other like the old gunfighters did.

Jim and I paid all expenses out of our own pockets. We filmed the competition. I still have the tape, but it's degraded so badly today that it's unusable. The trophies alone came to more than $300. They were big trophies. We had cash prizes, as well. Jim and I didn't make a profit on the show, but that had never been our intent. We wanted as many people as possible to win something. We awarded plaques to everyone who could shoot within one second, or some ridiculous amount of time that we knew everybody could do.

The contest really got over big. Paul Boesch, Nick Kozak, and Jerry Kozak were all there. Paul loved it. He even promoted it on television beforehand.

I had to be careful around the Kozak brothers. The problem was, we liked the same things, but we couldn't be seen together in public because we were opponents in the ring. It was a definite conflict of interests in regards to the wrestling business. They entered the contests, but we stayed away from each other.

There was one old man, though, who showed up wearing a frock coat, boots that came almost to his knees, and pearl-handled revolvers. By the time he showed up, everyone who had shot had qualified. Since he was old and looked the part, I thought, "This old guy must be fast." The guy stood on the line, pushed the button … and became the first person to get shot down. It didn't make any difference. We gave him a plaque, anyway. The look on his face made the entire weekend worth it all. He looked so pleased.

Before the walk-draw contest, I pulled out a number that would determine who I faced in the competition. Whose number did I pull? The one held by my brother, Jim. So, we had to face each other.

We stood on opposite ends of the carpet, and in the center of the carpet was a light. When that light came on, we had to draw and fire. We walked towards each other. I thought I'd be cool and draw while wearing gloves. That was so stupid. When the light came on, my gloved hand got tangled up between the gun and the holster … and Jim shot me. My own damn partner knocked me out of the competition. That son-of-a-bitch had the gall to grin at me, twirl his gun, and laugh. I said, "You didn't give me a chance."

If I hadn't been wearing the gloves … well, okay. I don't know what would have happened. The gloves were just a good excuse.

My editor asked me if being around the fans at the fast-draw contest hurt our status as heels. Not one bit. Jim and I were heels all the time. The people who came to watch the contest actually booed Jim and me when we got up to shoot. The only time Jim got any positive feedback was when he beat me. The fans all cheered.

I was so proud of Jim. He did really well in the tournament. He came in sixth out of 250 contestants, which placed him in the top five percent of fast-draw competitors in the nation.

There was a girl who competed in the fast-draw contests who won every time she entered — my wife Joanne. I had bought her a gun and taught her. She won the event Jim and I promoted, too … by beating Joe Bowman's wife in the final round. There was some heat over that because Joe had been

teaching me and, until we showed up, his wife had been the champion in the area. That really freaked everyone out.

There also was an old-time wrestler there named Marvin Jones, who wound up his career as a referee in Dallas. I set him up with a holster and gun and he practiced a lot. He got to be so good that he won a fast-draw contest.

Nick Kozak and I came up with the idea of having a fast-draw contest in the ring. Paul Boesch was a gimmick man, so he loved the idea. He interviewed us both on television and really sold the match. Normally, with Nick being the babyface, he would win an important event like this. On that night, however, I sent someone over to his dressing room to tell Nick, "Put Dalton over. He says it’s his gimmick." Nick was a businessman who always did what was right for the wrestling business, and on that night, he put me over. We stood in opposite corners of the ring. When the timer went off, we both drew and fired. The people loved it, even though he put me over and I won.

Of course, he paid me back later when we were both in Oregon, but that’s a story for the next chapter.

Nick loved our fast-draw gimmick so much that he and his brother, Jerry, used it when they went back to Amarillo.

Paul Boesch liked me because I put him over a lot. One night, we were working in Beaumont, which was Paul’s town. He was both the promoter and the announcer. Jim and I always did our gun twirl before our match. Before the match on that particular night, he told me, "When you guys come to the ring and do your gun twirl, finish by pointing them at me."

"What are you gonna do?"

"I’m going to take them away from you."

I asked him, "How are you gonna do that?"

"Come here. I want to show you something. I want you to point your gun at me."

When I did, he reached out and took it out of my hands before I could even think about pulling it back. I said, "That was cool, man."

Paul had been a military hero and the people in Houston loved him. When he took that gun out of my hand in the ring, twirled it around his finger, and handed it back to me, the people went crazy. He got the biggest pop I've ever heard. Of course, I acted like I was pissed and dumbfounded. In a way, I allowed him to hurt my gimmick because I was supposed to be fast, but in the long run, it didn't affect it at all, and Paul always took care of us because I put him over.

When Morris Sigel died in 1966, Paul bought the promotion from Sigel's widow. Boesch had been working closely with Sigel for almost 20 years, so he knew both the wrestling business and what it was Houston fans wanted. I went back to Texas for Paul in 1976, but by then, I had given up the Dalton gimmick and was wrestling as Don Fargo.

Not too long ago, I contacted the local fast-draw club to see if I could renew my membership. They have contests all over the country, but boy, have they ever changed. You can't use gimmick holsters or guns. They're trying to do it like they did in the Old West.

Chapter 16
Barbed-Wire Matches

For the first two months, Jim and I wrestled all the top stars of the territory — Duke Keomuka [Hisao Tanaka], Mike DiBiase, Ciclon Negro [Ramon Rodriguez], Shag Thomas [James Thomas], Sputnik Monroe [Roscoe Brumbaugh], and Pat O’Connor. The biggest star there, however, was Wild Bull Curry [Fred Thomas Koury Sr.]. He was more of a brawler than a wrestler, and when his name appeared on a card, the wrestling fans were confident they would be seeing a lot of uncontrolled mayhem. In fact, in 1953, Morris Sigel created the Texas brass-knuckles title for Bull, a title I would win from him in Dallas on March 13, 1962. Bull regained the title from me a week later and would hold it a total of at least 20 times through 1967.

I loved the brass knuckles matches. I always told my opponents to "lay them in!" When I went back to the dressing room, my eyes would be swollen. I was very adamant that, no matter what I did in the ring, it was important that I convince the people that what we were doing was real. There are some people you can’t convince unless you go to extremes.

One day, Paul Boesch told us they were building towards a cage match between Jim and me and whoever it was they were pushing at the time. I told him, "Why don’t we have a barbed-wire match, instead?"

He just stared at me. "What?"

"Wrap the ring ropes with barbed wire."

He didn’t think it was a good idea. "Ah, that won’t get over."

I said, "Trust me. Just string it with barbed wire. Believe me. It’ll work."

"Well, maybe it will, but that’s crazy. You’ll kill each other."

"Nah. Let’s do it."

He did it and we drew a big crowd. In the dressing room before the match, the babyface said, "Don’t push me on that fuckin’ wire."

"Fuck! What are you? A baby?"

During the match, I told my opponent to throw me into the ropes. Just before I hit, I turned around so the barbs sank into my flesh, and then I slumped down so they ripped long gashes down my back. My back was a solid mass of blood. Anybody who may have been a doubter when they arrived at the arena that night, left as a believer. They may not truly have believed what went on in the ring before that, but there was no doubt in their minds when they went home later that night. At home after the matches, I looked at my back in the mirror and asked my wife, "How does it look?"

"It’s scarred up pretty good."

That wasn’t good enough for me. I got an old bottle opener and told her, "Help me out. Rake my back with this and make it look better." Or worse, depending on how you looked at it.

She didn’t hesitate. She took the sharp end of the opener and raked it across my back. "Ah-hhhh!" When she finished, nobody could say the barbed wire wasn’t anything but real. I made believers out of everyone.

I remember hearing people yell, "Aw, that’s bullshit." I never heard anyone say that during my matches. They’d yell, "Hit ‘em hard. We wanna see blood!" That’s when I’d tell my opponent, "Give me some blood. Hit me! Hit me!" The other wrestlers who didn’t do that thought I was crazy. I did it because I wanted people to believe in what I was doing.

Bull was a lot like me. He loved the gimmick matches. We wrestled in just about every kind of match you could think of. Loser leave town, wire matches, belt matches. Paul Boesch came up with the idea to have the two of us wrestle in a loser gets painted yellow match. It was water-based paint, so it washed off easy, but it really looked good. Of course, I was the heel, so

I lost. Bull knocked me into a washtub they had placed in the ring and I was painted yellow from head to toe. The match was featured in the August 1963 issue of Wrestling Revue magazine.

In 1962, Benji Ramirez came into Dallas as the Mummy, one of the most unique characters I had ever seen. I watched him in the dressing room before his match. He sprinkled baby powder on his costume so dust would fly off when his opponent hit him. He really looked like an ancient mummy.

I hate to say anything bad about Al Galento because he’s dead, but the truth is the truth. Al was with us for a long time, but our business relationship didn’t end well. He wanted us to do something we didn’t want to do, so he went behind our backs to Morris Sigel. He tried to backstab me by saying things like, "You’d better keep an eye on Jack Dalton because he does drugs. He’s been in prison, too." He said all kinds of things.

Morris finally called us together for a meeting. When he had the three of us standing in his office, Morris asked Al, "Tell me the things you told me the other day."

Al said, "Well, Jack does drugs."

I just stood there and listened. Morris turned to me and asked, "Is that true."

I said, "Yeah."

Morris said, "Well, Al. I think you’d better find somebody else to manage because I don’t think these boys need you anymore."

Morris kept Jim and me and got rid of Al. I hated to see Al go, but he brought it on himself. He thought stooging us off would make him look better to Morris, but it had the opposite effect.

I hear people talk about how Al Galento was one of the toughest wrestlers in the business, but something happened in Beaumont that made me question that. One of the things I learned early in my career was that everybody was tough in the car. In fact, a lot of the boys built their reputations in the car by telling stories about all the guys they had stretched

and the asses they had kicked. I never talked like that because wrestling, to me, wasn’t about shooting. It was about entertaining the people.

On one particular night in Beaumont, some kid heckled Al throughout our match. He never let up. Of course, Al was old at that time, and skinny as a rail, so many people thought he was all bark and no bite. When the matches were over, the kid waited for us to leave the building. When we walked out, the kid walked up and issued a challenge to Al. We tried to talk him out of it, but Al interrupted and said, "No, I can handle it." They went at each other and the kid got a side headlock on Al. Al couldn’t get out of it! Jim and I finally walked up to the kid and said, "Either let the old man go or we’ll fucking kill your ass." The kid wasn’t stupid and he wasn’t deaf. He let him go.

Right there, I came to the realization that so many of the stories in our business were just that — stories. I didn’t care how old Al was. He could have done a lot of things to get out of that side headlock. He could have reached down and grabbed the kid’s nuts, or turned his head and bit him on the waist, but he didn’t do anything. He simply froze. I think that’s where the hard feelings began to come between us because Jim and I lost a lot of respect for him. Al knew it, too. We didn’t say anything about it, but I’m sure he could tell by our attitudes.

In October 1962, we went to work in the West Texas [Amarillo] territory. Before we left, I had Joanne write a letter to Tommy Phelps, who was working for the wrestling office there. Tommy found religion shortly before we arrived in Amarillo and became a preacher. I know God can change people, but to me, Tommy Phelps preaching was like Lou Plummer (another old-time wrestler) answering questions about the Bible on The $64,000 Question radio program. The only thing one-eyed Plummer knew about the Bible was how to break every rule in it.

Tommy, who had wrestled for Jack Pfefer at one time as Bummy Rogers (among several upon whom Pfefer bestowed the gimmick), was an old friend of mine. He knew how wild and crazy I was, and word had gotten around to the other promoters about the things I did and the trouble I had gotten into. Joanne said I had apologized for the things I had done in the past and that I had turned over a new leaf. I knew Tommy would have to

make an end-run to get us into the territory. He passed on my letter to the promoter, Dory Funk Sr., and he agreed to bring us in.

We pulled into Amarillo on the first day of October and wrestled that night against Johnny Como (who later would change his name to Pedro Morales) and Cowboy Bob Ellis [Robert W. Ellis]. At the time, Funk Senior's oldest son, Dory Funk Jr., was training to break into the business. Jim and I went to the Sportatorium to work out with him now and then. Terry wanted to get into the business, too, but he had just turned 18 and was playing football at West Texas State University. That didn't keep him from getting into the ring with us when he was home. "Let me try it! I can do that!"

I was given the privilege of working with Dory in his first professional match. On January 10, 1963, we wrestled in a singles match with Jim handcuffed to Terry to prevent Jim from interfering in the match. I don't remember anything about the match itself, but I worked with Dory many times in the years that followed and I enjoyed every one of our matches.

My favorite story about Jim took place during this run in West Texas. I told him, "You know, Jim. We're the Dalton brothers. We carry guns and we dress like cowboys. We look like we just came out of the eighteen hundreds. We need horses."

"What?"

"Horses. We can take them to the towns."

"I ain't ridin' a horse to the towns."

"No, no, no, dumbass. We'll haul them in a trailer, stop somewhere before we get to the arena, and ride the horses the rest of the way."

We couldn't afford to buy or rent horses, but Cowboy Bob Ellis owned a spread in the area. He overheard us talking about it in the dressing room and said, "You guys can borrow two of my horses and a trailer. If you take care of everything, you guys are welcome to them. It would be good for the gimmick."

That was really nice of him. We did it one time … and that one time was enough.

At Bob’s ranch the next day, he loaded the horses onto the trailer. Unfortunately, we didn’t watch him do it. All we heard was the sound of the horses’ hooves banging on the metal ramp and wooden floor. We hooked the trailer to my station wagon and left. Jim and I were grinning from ear to ear. We were real cowboys now. Not only did we look like cowboys, but we had horses and saddles.

We drove to Lubbock, which was about 120 miles. There was a gas station and convenience store about 100 yards away from the arena, so we pulled around back and parked the car.

We didn’t have any problem unloading the horses because they were ready to get out. We fed and watered them according to Bob’s instructions. Thank goodness Bob had already put on their saddles because we wouldn’t have known how to do that. Jim and I climbed up onto the horses and headed for the arena. With our frock coats, cowboy boots, hats, and our guns, we really looked the part. We rode to the arena and arrived exactly as we had planned … when the people were lined up outside to buy their tickets. When we rode up, everybody began to scream and holler. The horses got a bit jumpy. An usher came out and led us into the arena. The arena also was used for rodeos and cattle sales. They put sawdust on the floor for the wrestling matches. We tied up the horses and went to the dressing room.

When the matches were over, we rode the horses back to the trailer. We expected the horses to get into the trailer as easily as they came out, but they absolutely refused to budge. No matter how much pulling, pushing, begging, pleading, and cursing we did, they would not move. We even went inside the trailer and tried to coax them in. "Tsk, tsk, tsk. Come on. Come on in." It suddenly dawned on me: "This is wrong. This trailer stall is narrow. If they come in, we won’t be able to get around them to get out. We’ll be stuck in here."

We got out and tried to move them again. Jim said, "How in the hell did Ellis get them in there so easily?"

We tried to pick up their front hooves and make them walk. When a horse doesn’t want to lift his leg, there’s no way you’re going to make him do it. We couldn’t budge them. We didn’t know what to do. After 30 minutes or so, Lou Thesz and some of the other guys drove around back. They had stopped at the store to pick up some drinks and food. Thesz walked over and said, "You guys having trouble with those horses?"

I said, "Yeah, man. We can’t get the bastards in the trailer."

He said, "Ah, I’ll show you how to do it."

He put his back against the rear of one of the horses, knelt down, picked it up by the back legs, and pushed it into the trailer. That horse walked right in. He did the same thing with the second horse, raised the ramp, and locked the gate. He turned around and grinned. "You call yourselves cowboys?"

Jim and I were so relieved, but little did we know, the worst part of our journey was about to begin.

During our trip back to Amarillo, Jim and I talked and laughed about the incident. All of a sudden, when we were still 20 miles from Bob Ellis’ ranch … BOOM! One of the back tires on the station wagon exploded. I said, "Jim. There’s no way we can walk all the way to Amarillo. I’ve gotta drive my car. I don’t wanna leave it here. You’ve gotta ride one of the horses."

We couldn’t sit there until someone came along in the morning, either, because it was cold. We backed the horses out and tied them together. Jim climbed up on one and we set off down the road. Ka-blunk, ka-blunk, ka-blunk. I rode on that ripped tire for about ten miles. All of a sudden, I heard the tire come off completely. I was riding on the rim. The wheel was throwing off sparks and making a terrible sound. Fortunately, we weren’t too far from Ellis’ ranch.

In the meantime, Jim’s ass had to be blistered. The pace I set had the horse trotting every mile of the way. No easy walk, no smooth gallop. Just a constant trot that sent Jim’s ass off the saddle and into the air with every step the horse took. That poor kid was so sore. Twenty miles is a long way

to ride with a flat tire, but it’s even worse to ride a horse that far. By the time we pulled into the ranch, the horses had foam coming out of their mouths. Ellis ran out and said, "Where in the fuck have you guys been?"

"We had a flat!"

Bob said, "I don’t think you guys need to ride horses to enhance your gimmick."

I said, "Don’t worry. We’re not riding horses ever again."

Jim piped up, "What do you mean ‘we’?"

Jim and I left Amarillo in late January and started a run in Portland, Oregon in February 1963. I can’t remember if I gave my notice to Funk Sr. or not. There were so many times I didn’t give notice. That’s what got the heat on me and caused me a lot of problems with promoters.

Jim and I each had our own families, so we packed our cars and followed each other. We got separated before we got to Albuquerque, which was about 280 miles from Amarillo. Neither of us had any idea where the other one was. We didn’t have cell phones in those days, so we didn’t have any way of contacting each other while we were on the road. We wanted to get there together so we could look for an apartment. Without a method of communication, though, we had no way to find each other, even after we arrived in Portland.

As we drove through the Painted Desert in Arizona, more than 350 miles from Albuquerque, I happened to look way out in the distance and saw a roadside shelter where they sold barbeque. There was one solitary car parked in the parking lot. It was Jim and his family. After all those miles, we just happened to run into each other. I couldn’t believe it.

We found a nice, two-bedroom apartment in Portland for $90 a month. The first thing I did was hang all my guns on the wall. Displaying my guns was always my first priority. I also found a gun store there. I loved Winchester rifles. Back then, I could buy a Winchester or Marlin rifle, lever-action, for about $28. I couldn’t afford $28 because I couldn’t keep the money in my

pocket long enough to get to the gun store. We were paid in cash every night in those days, which made it hard to save. If we had been paid weekly, or every other week, we probably would have put it in the bank and made draws when we needed it. Instead, we had cash in our pockets and it just went. It was tough to save enough money for rent.

I didn't like the Portland territory. It was beautiful country and they have gorgeous lakes, but all it did there was rain. I would wake up in the morning, reach up to open the Venetian blinds, and look out at the mist and rain. I'd shut them and go back to sleep. The people who lived there didn't seem to mind it, but I thought it was a depressing place to live.

Don Owen, the promoter in Portland, liked us, but his brother, Elton, ran most of the shows. They used to call Portland a "shooter's territory." They used junior heavyweights. King Curtis Iaukea was in the territory, but he was called Prince Kuhio then. He looked like a giant compared to the rest of the crew. Some of the others wrestling there were Bob Boyer, Ricky Hunter [Charles Sprott], Haru Sasaki [Stanley Haruo Sasaki], Rocky Columbo [John Colombo], Bill Savage [William Faynik], Lorenzo Parente, and Maurice Vachon. Elton would pay the shooters extra to get into the ring and shoot on their opponents.

Elton convinced Billy White Wolf [Adnan Al-Kaissie] to test me out one night. Tom Drake was refereeing that night and gave me tips on what I could do to counter him. White Wolf and I had fun shooting, but we eventually settled down and got back to what we were supposed to be doing … which was entertaining the people.

When we made the trip to Seattle, we stayed in a nice hotel there. It had a kitchenette, so we'd get there early and buy a pot roast. We'd put it in the oven, let it cook while we were at the matches, and when we got home, it would be ready to eat.

Nick Kozak was in Portland when we were there, and he figured it was time to pay me back for making him put me over in Dallas. One day, he asked me if I wanted to go up into the mountains. He had a friend up there who owned horses. By that time, I had enough of horses. Having had my ribs kicked in by one, coupled with the fiasco with Bob Ellis' horses, had

convinced me to swear off horses for the rest of my life. Even so, I said, "Okay, I'd like to go," because I loved going out into the country.

I told Nick I was going to wear my gimmick. I didn't go anywhere without it. I strapped on my guns, my spurs, my cowboy hat, and my saddlebags of beer. It was kind of chilly, so I wore a coat that looked like an old western coat.

As soon as we arrived at the place where the horses were kept, we decided to go for a ride. I couldn't get up on the horse, so they stacked up two Coke cases and helped me up. I was wearing all kinds of things that jingled and the beer cans clanged together. As soon as my ass hit that seat, the horse dropped his ears and looked back at me. Nick's friend said, "Let's go," and swatted my horse on the ass. That beast took off and headed down the dirt highway in a full gallop. The beer cans were going "Buh-lang! Buh-lang! Buh-lang!" When the horse ran out onto the highway, he took off. All of a sudden, I felt the saddle slide a bit to one side. I let go of the reins and grabbed the saddle horn. I hollered, "Whoaaaaaa!" I was bouncing up and down. The horse didn't slow down one bit when it came to a bend in the road. It made a sharp right turn … and my saddle and I made a sharp left. We came right off the horse. I couldn't do a thing. I couldn't even get my feet out of the stirrups. I remember seeing my gun slide across the road, and by the time I was able to get to my feet, the horse was gone. A few seconds later, here comes Nick's friend in his pickup truck. I thought he was concerned that I might have been hurt. For that matter, I could have been killed … but he roared right past me and went after the horse.

Cans of beer were strewn everywhere. Some were crushed, some were slightly dented, while others had split open and beer was squirting up into the air. The first thing I did was pick up my guns and wipe them off. The handles were broken and the barrels were scratched up. I was so mad. Kozak was laughing hysterically when he walked up. Those sons-of-bitches said they didn't loosen my saddle on purpose, but I know they did. A saddle would never come off like that. That was a real rib. It wasn't funny then, but I have to admit, after I had time to cool off, I thought it was hilarious.

Women really loved the Dalton gimmick. They were always talking to us. They liked the bad guy look, with guns on our hips and the western clothes.

One night, I was at the hotel bar with John Smith [Walter Allen], who wrestled as Soldat Gorky. A girl walked in who looked a lot like Veronica Lake, the movie actress who starred in films during the 1940s. She was known for having long, beautiful hair that usually hung down and covered her right eye, creating an air of mystery about her and enhancing her natural beauty. I asked the girl, "Do you remember Veronica Lake?"

"No, I don’t."

I said, "She was a movie star. You wear your hair like she did. If you had blonde hair, you would look just like her."

She said, "Are you saying I look like a movie star?"

"Yeah. You sure do."

She looked me straight in the eyes and said, "Would I look like a movie star if I did this?"

She pulled her hair back to reveal a long scar that stretched from above her right eye to her chin. I think I surprised her when I said, "Wow, I like it." That fit my gimmick. I always found things like that to be cool. I asked her, "Are you doing anything tonight?"

She said, "No." When I told her I was going to see a buddy of mine, a wrestler, she said, "You’re a wrestler?"

"Yeah." I had my guns on, as always. "I’m Jack Dalton."

She told me she had heard of me. I took her upstairs to show her off to John Smith. I was proud to be with her. When I walked into the room, I said, "Hey, man. Look at what I found … this good-lookin’ chick, man. Show him your scar."

I made her feel so good about herself that she didn’t hesitate. She pulled back her hair and showed John her scar.

I wanted to be seen with her, so we spent the next few days together. We didn’t do anything sexual. We just hung out together. I thought she looked

cool. She never did tell me how it happened, and I didn't ask, but it had to be a knife wound. Her eye wasn't messed up too badly, but it drooped down a little.

Four months after we arrived in Portland, Jim and I went back to Texas. On September 10, after having been in the territory for three months, I got into trouble in Dallas. I have to admit that I did things during my career that caused problems for me (and the promoters for whom I worked), but this was a situation over which I had no control.

After one of my matches with Mark Lewin, someone threw a soft drink at my head while I was on my way back to the dressing room. As I jerked my head backwards in an attempt to avoid the missile, the back of my head struck a woman in the nose and she fell to the floor. As it turned out, she just happened to be the wife of one of the deputy sheriffs. The lawmen thought I had attacked her, so they converged around me and tried to restrain me. I really didn't know what was going on, so I fought back. They pulled out their blackjacks and beat me down until they could get handcuffs around my wrists. They were going to take me to jail until Mark Lewin came to my rescue and explained the situation.

I was booked in Dallas the following week, but Morris thought the best thing for both Jim and me would be for us to get the hell out of Dodge … or, in this case, Dallas.

Chapter 17
Keystone Cops

When Jim and I left Texas, we went to San Francisco. The only thing I really remember about that territory was a terrible incident that took place.

In October 1963, someone in the balcony at the Cow Palace fired a gun at whoever was in the ring. The bullet hit one of the ring posts, ricocheted off, and hit a little girl. It didn't kill her, but it did hit her. Security tried to find the guy, but they never did.

After six months, Jim and I split up. Roy Shire, who ran the northern California territory, said he wanted me to leave Jim and team up with Ray Stevens. I told him I wasn't going to leave Jim. When Shire insisted, I told Jim about it and we decided to leave. We went to Memphis, but Jim went home a short time after we got there. There weren't any problems between us. In fact, we got back together for a short time two years later, but at the time, we both wanted to do something different.

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Wrestling Revue ratings, April 1964

Male -- 1. Lou Thesz; 2. Bruno Sammartino; 3. Verne Gagne; 4. Fritz Von Erich; 5. Eddie Graham; 6. Edouard Carpentier; 7. Gene Kiniski; 8. Dan Hodge; 9. Wilbur Snyder; 10. Bearcat Wright
Female -- 1. June Byers; 2. Fabulous Moolah; 3. Judy Grable; 4. Penny Banner; 5. Kay Noble; 6. Jessica Rogers; 7. Ann Casey; 8. Karen Kellogg; 9. Fran Gravette; 10. Verne Bottoms
Tag Teams -- 1. Pepper Gomez and Jose Lothario; 2. Art Neilson and Stan Neilson [Stan Holek]; 3. Killer Kowalski and Gorilla Monsoon; 4. Mitsu Arakawa and Kinji Shibuya 5. Bobo Brazil and Dory Dixon; 6. The Kangaroos [Al Costello, Roy Heffernan]; 7. The Von Brauners 8. The Medics; 9. The Daltons; 10. The Scufflin' Hillbillies

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In April 1964, I moved back to Tennessee to reprise my role with Jackie as the Fabulous Fargos. There were three heel teams there at the time — Kurt and Karl Von Brauner, Corsica Joe and Jean, and Tojo Yamamoto and Alex Perez — so we had plenty of match-ups to keep us busy.

Unlike a lot of the boys, Jackie and I never minded making the trips. We loved the road. We loaded up the car with beer and hit the highway. We took a lot of pictures of our trips, too. We were like marks. We looked like tourists with cameras around our necks. We had a Bell and Howell movie camera, which is what I used to film my fast-draw movies. We took pictures everywhere.

I have pictures of the first time we drove through the old tunnel into Mobile. We would have driven through the tunnel the week before, but we were broke when we got there and didn't have enough money to pay the toll. That's sad considering it was only 20 cents at the time. We had spent all our money on beer and cigars. We tried to get the attendant to take our watches as collateral, but he wouldn't accept them. We tried to tell him who we were, but he didn't care. Here we were, the Fabulous Fargos, tag team champions of the world, and we couldn't pay the 20-cent toll. We had to drive all the way around, and the route took us many miles out of our way.

One night, Jackie and I wrestled in Adamsville, Tennessee, the hometown of Buford Pusser, the sheriff in McNairy County. The 1968 film, Walking Tall, was based on Buford's life. Buford had a lot of political power in that town. He promoted that card and set up a ring in the middle of the main street. During our match, Al and Don Greene jumped into the ring and attacked us. We didn't know what was going on because we didn't know who they were. They had just come into the territory and Nick had told them to get involved in our match so they would have publicity going into the show the following week. When we got back to the dressing room, one of the boys told us who they were.

It was about three weeks before we saw them again. Jackie and I went to the wrestling office at the Sam Davis Hotel to talk with Nick Gulas. Two guys with green hair were sitting in the waiting room. Jackie turned to look

at me and said, "Green hair? What’s this business coming to?" Now, that was really funny because Jackie and I both had long hair. In those days, very few people had long hair. Not only that, but we each wore an earring in our right ears … the wrong ear. There’s something about a pot and a kettle that comes to mind.

At the end of August 1964, I struck out on my own again and went to work for Ray Gunkel and Buddy Fuller in the Atlanta office.

Buddy Fuller was always good to me. At different times in my career, he was responsible for bringing me into Tennessee, Alabama, Arizona, and Georgia. Like Jack Pfefer, he was before his time. He loved gimmicks and always gave the fans something to talk about when he promoted shows.

Ray Gunkel, the promoter in Atlanta, was good to me, too. He was a nice guy, to boot. When I went into Atlanta, I didn’t have a place to live. He said, "Look, Fargo." I had been wrestling as Jack Dalton before I got there, but since Atlanta was so close to Chattanooga, he wanted me to wrestle as Don Fargo. He said, "I’ve got a small ranch in Athens with a big, empty house. I’ll rent it to you. Just take care of it. Don’t tear it up. And don’t build on it."

It was a beautiful stone house. It was completely furnished with a big wood fireplace. After we unpacked our belongings, I decided to build a fire in the fireplace because it was cold, so I loaded it up with firewood. To make it burn hotter and quicker, I mixed coal in with the wood. I like my house with the lights down low, so I didn’t notice when smoke began to collect in the ceiling. I noticed a smoky odor, but attributed it to the fire and didn’t pay much attention to it. My wife came out a few minutes later and said, "There’s something wrong."

I went to the bathroom. When I looked in the mirror, my face had black soot all over it. I ran back out and turned on the lights. Everything was covered in a layer of soot. Everything! We had forgotten to open the chimney flu. All I could think was, "God, if Gunkel sees this ..." We were up until three in the morning cleaning every square inch of that house.

Ray had also said that I shouldn’t build anything on the property. Buddy Fuller owned a ranch not too far from Ray’s property where he raised quarter horses. He sold me two of them. I love horses, but I had no desire to ride since the incidents with Ray Stevens and Nick Kozak. I wanted one, though. My thinking was, even though I was wrestling as Don Fargo, at heart, I was still a Dalton. I couldn’t be a Dalton without a horse, so I bought the horses and kept them on Gunkel’s property. I was living the part of a rancher. I built a fence, which I wasn’t supposed to do. I built a little barn for the horses, which I wasn’t supposed to do. When Ray stopped by to see us one day, the first words out of his mouth were, "Dammit, Fargo!" He didn’t like it, but he didn’t say much. He said, "Don’t do anything else." So, I didn’t. By that time, I had already done as much as I had planned to do.

One of the wrestlers in the Atlanta territory was Dick Dunn [Richard Demonbreun]. I originally met (and wrestled) Dick in Mobile in 1958. For the most part, he was a quiet, humble guy. They called him "buggy whip arms" because he had long, skinny arms. He didn’t have much expression, either, but the people loved him.

In 1961, Dick and two others wrestlers, Billy Garrett [J.B. Garrett] and Joe Costello, were involved in a shooting in Nashville. Costello started the evening at a bar called the Snack Bar, but got run out when he began flirting with the owner’s wife. He went to a bar called The Basement and ran into Dunn and Garrett. He talked to them like nothing had happened and they went back to the Snack Bar to have a good time and some drinks. There was a midget with them. The owner saw them and thought they were coming in to gang up on him. He got his gun and, without asking any questions, told them to leave. Costello refused to back down, so the guy shot him in the heart. Dick and Billy didn’t know Costello had been run out earlier that evening. When they ran off, the owner shot Dick Dunn, who was running up the stairs, in the hip. Garrett got shot in the stomach and the midget got away cleanly. Costello made his way upstairs, flagged down a cab, and told them to take him to the hospital, where he died. Four months later, the bar owner pleaded self defense and was acquitted in Costello’s murder.

Billy and Dick both recovered quickly and got on with their wrestling careers. In fact, they made such a hit in Florida wrestling under masks as the Medics that wrestling fans there still talk about them. Dick later made a home for himself in the Mobile territory. When his wife left him, he kind of went downhill.

When Joanne and I first arrived in Atlanta, we moved into a trailer park. As luck would have it, the managers of the park gave us a lot right next to the one where Sputnik Monroe lived. Normally, that wouldn't be a problem, but Fuller had booked us against each other. It didn't look too good for us to be living next to each other when we had sworn on television to annihilate each other. Fuller called us both into the office and said, "We've gotta do something about this. We can't have the people see the two of you living next door to each other. One of you guys has gotta move."

I said, "I ain't movin'."

Sputnik said, "Well, I ain't movin'."

We decided to get up the next morning and get into a fight when people were leaving for work. Sputnik got up that morning, walked over to my trailer, and yelled, "Don Fargo! Get your ass out here!"

I stuck my head out the door and yelled back, "What's wrong with you? We're tryin' to sleep."

"I want you out of this trailer park. I was here before you. Pack your bags and hit the road."

I went outside and, after a few more words (to give more people time to look out to see what was going on) we began to beat the hell out of each other. It was a big trailer park and we could be heard two blocks away. People were stopping their cars and getting out to watch, while others looked out the windows of their trailers, or watched us from their front porches. As we traded blows, I whispered to him, "Bust me open, man!"

He did his best to split the skin above my eyebrow so I'd bleed, but he couldn't do it. We just kept on fighting.

What I didn’t realize was that Sputnik knew every black person in that neighborhood. For those who don’t know, Sputnik was the first white black wrestler. He loved the black people and they loved him back. He talked their language. He stood up for the blacks in Memphis when only a certain number of them were allowed to come into Ellis Auditorium for the matches.

As we were fighting, a huge black woman picked up the birdbath I had in my yard and slammed it down over my head. The blood was flowing now! Man, she knocked me silly. Somehow, I managed to stay on my feet and continue to "fight" Sputnik. We fought until the fire department and police showed up. They arrested both of us and took us to jail. Of course, I told them to call Buddy Fuller, who was waiting at home to come bail us out. We didn’t fool the judge, though. When we appeared before him, he said, "I don’t want to see you guys back here again. If you pull any other kind of publicity stunt and wind up in my court, you’ll sit in jail for a long time before I let anyone post bail for you."

The scenario turned out to be a great idea because the Atlanta City Auditorium was packed that night to see Sputnik defend his Georgia title against me. I showed up at the arena with my arm in a sling, a crutch under one arm, and my head all bandaged. I went to the ring and told the people, "I can’t wrestle tonight because I got hurt this morning when this no-good coward attacked me when I wasn’t looking." Of course, everybody had heard the story and knew I was lying. They booed me and called me all kinds of names until Sputnik ran out and ripped off the sling and bandages, pulled the crutch out from under my arm, and exposed my deception. The whole scenario really got over in a big way.

On that note, the topic of black wrestlers is an interesting one because I have a reputation of being a racist. Nothing could be further from the truth. I loved the black fans because they supported the wrestling business by buying tickets to the matches, and I had no problem wrestling or teaming up with a black wrestler. I didn’t care if someone was black, yellow or green, especially when it came to making money. If teaming with or wrestling against a black man made money, I would do it.

There were certain towns in Mississippi where the white wrestlers refused to work with Ernie Ladd because they were scared of how people might react. Ernie used to tell people, "Don Fargo would wrestle me when no other white man would."

When I was in Buffalo, Ernie didn't have a car, so I picked him up and hauled him around. We traveled together for a long time and became good friends. We had some great conversations. I wrestled Ernie hundreds of times in the Buffalo, Texas, Indianapolis, and Detroit territories. When I wrestled in Mississippi, nobody wanted to wrestle Ernie because he was older and had trouble with his knees, so it was hard to get a good match out of him. He was a lot bigger than everyone else, too, so he wasn't much of a bump-taker. He wasn't a drop-kicker, and he sure as hell wasn't about to take a back body-drop. Even so, I had great matches with him, but it was because I had studied his way of working.

I learned about drawing money with the blacks from Sputnik Monroe. He was smart. They packed the arenas to see him, especially in Memphis. Memphis wrestling fans didn't buy tickets to see the black wrestlers. They bought tickets to see Sputnik.

For a short time during this run, Johnny Long [Billy Strong] and I got together and teamed as Jack and Bob Dalton. It only lasted a month and it seemed strange to have someone other than Jim in the role, but hey … the Daltons had a lot of kinfolk.

I spent five months in Atlanta before returning to Nashville for five weeks. Jim and I were scheduled to return to the Dallas territory at the end of March 1965, so I was just filling time.

During that run in Dallas, I met a really nice girl. I don't know what she did for a living. I never asked. The boys said she was an arena rat, but I never saw her with any of the boys. From what I could tell, she was just a girl who came to the matches. I later heard that she used to be Sputnik Monroe's girlfriend.

The night we met, I had gone to get some beer after I wrestled. Normally, I kept beer in my saddle bags so it was always handy, but I ran out that night

before we got to the matches. Fritz von Erich, who was the promoter at that time, used to have beer in the dressing room for the boys, but only after the matches were over. If I wasn't in the main event, I didn't want to wait, so I'd buy some at the concession stand.

I was standing back by the dressing room door, which had a curtain blocking the opening so the fans couldn't see us. As I stood there drinking my beer, I saw her staring at me. I had on my full Dalton outfit … tall cowboy boots, spurs, chaps, and guns. I figured she was flirting, so I stared back. After a few minutes, she walked over and we began talking. We got together from then on every time I was in Dallas. She was really nice. She would buy me anything I wanted. I didn't see her again for a long time after I left Dallas in May 1965.

Years later, they opened up a town in Utah and the promoter flew a bunch of us out for a show. When I sat down, I looked across the aisle and saw someone who looked familiar. He said, "Hey, Fargo. Recognize me?"

It was Jet Monroe, Sputnik's brother. We caught up on old times and told each other what our plans were for the future. Jet said, "Well, I live in Utah, so I'm headed home."

I told him I had to find a motel when we landed and that I would be wrestling that night. "Where are you wrestling?" When I told him, he said, "I know a motel right near there. I'll drop you off."

"Is your car at the airport?"

"No. My wife is picking me up."

As we walked through the airport parking lot, he pointed out his wife and car. As we got closer, I thought, "Oh, my god! It's that girl I used to go with!" The look on her face when she saw me was too funny to describe. Jet introduced us and we both pretended like we didn't know each other.

Later that night at the matches, I look out from the ring, and there she sat with Jet. I had one hell of a time wrestling that night. I couldn't get my

mind into what I was supposed to be doing because she was a beautiful woman and I could feel her eyes on me.

In May, Bull Curry got us booked in the Halifax [Nova Scotia] territory. The plan was for him to come in later and work against us with a partner, but Bull never made the trip while we were there. While we were in Nova Scotia, Jim and I got really close to Mickey Sharpe [Malcolm Rudy], one of the headliners there. We wrestled against Mickey and one of the promoters, Rudy Kay, almost every night for the first couple of weeks. One night, about five weeks into our run there, we decided to stay over and not go home until the next morning. We figured we'd play poker until the wee hours of the morning, get a few hours sleep, and then drive home. Mickey said, "No, no. I'm saving my money."

On July 9, we wrestled in Halifax. Mickey had a young boy with him — his boyfriend — and they had bought a little Volkswagen. On the way home, they were involved in a head-on collision and Mickey was killed. The hill they got killed on was known as a death hill. The police investigated the accident and came to the conclusion that some kids had turned out their headlights and were racing up the hill on both sides of the road. Mickey and his boyfriend were just coming over the crest of the hill and hit them head-on. Jim and I didn't want to identify the bodies when the police asked us, but we did. The young boy was a good-looking kid. His jet-black hair had turned snow white.

As we drove away, we decided to leave the territory. We refused to stay and work out our notice. I've seen a lot of bad things in my life, but being so close to Mickey, it really hit me hard. To make matters worse, I had to call Mickey's dad and give him the news.

From there, Jim and I went to Montreal for two months. On my last shot in Montreal, I wrestled none other than my mentor … Buddy Rogers. What a great night that was! I felt like I had finally arrived.

In September, Jim and I went to wrestle for LeRoy McGuirk in the Oklahoma territory. We were only there for four weeks because the promoters (and some of the wrestlers) didn't like some of the things we did. We were always looking for an excuse to pull a rib on someone. We must

have dropped our drawers and mooned everybody in the state. We were always doing something in the dressing rooms. When the midgets were there, we would do silly stuff like hide their clothes when they went to the ring. One time, Jim found a ladder in a closet, so we got on it and nailed their shoes and clothes to the ceiling. We would take the clothes out of one person's bag and put them in someone else's, or we would pile everybody belongings in the middle of the dressing room and randomly put it all back into whatever suitcase we wanted.

After that, we went to Louisiana, where I would spend a great deal of time over the next several years. In fact, Louisiana became one of my favorite places to wrestle.

From 1957 through 1960, Jackie and I went in and out of the Mobile territory for Lee Fields quite often. The primary towns there were Mobile, Pensacola, and Panama City. In late 1965, I called Lee to see if he could use Jim and me in Mobile. He said, "I can use you, but not in Mobile."

"Waddaya mean?"

"I'm gonna send you to my new territory. Louisiana. I just opened it. Rocky McGuire is running things there."

I didn't like the idea because I had never been there, but I wanted to stay in the South and that was the only option available to us at the time. The office was in Lafayette, so I moved my family there. We worked Lafayette, Baton Rouge, Morgan City, Alexandria, and whatever spot shows they ran at the time. Since it was an offshoot of the Mobile territory, wrestlers traveled back and forth between the two, which was good for the fans because they got to see twice as many faces as they normally would. Where we wrestled depended on what Lee needed at any particular time.

I enjoyed working the Mobile side of the territory, but I liked Louisiana better. I had more fun there and the fans were wilder. I had a girlfriend there, too. When I add all that together with a nice home and my kids happy in school there, it was the place I wanted to be. That part of the country fit my personality, too. The first time I walked into a bar in Baton Rouge, I thought I had stepped through a time warp into the Old West. Men were

openly playing poker for money and they had guns on the tables, in holsters on their hips, and tucked into their waistbands. The Daltons fit right in because we didn’t go anywhere without our guns.

As the Daltons, Jim and I, along with Bobby Fields, Cowboy Bob Kelly, and the Baillargeon brothers —Adrian and Tony — were kind of like the pioneers of the Louisiana territory. Over time, it became a hot territory for Lee and it made him a lot of money.

There were two brothers who came to the matches every week in Baton Rouge. They heckled me without mercy. One night, when I was working with Ernie Ladd, I just couldn’t take it anymore. I left the ring and walked up to one of them. When he turned to run, I grabbed him … and a cop grabbed me. Meanwhile, the other brother, who was sitting in the general admission grandstand, came running down the steps. He pulled out the cop’s nightstick and brought it down over my head. The wood broke and the end flew up into the air. It split me wide open, but I didn’t realize it because the adrenalin was flowing. As soon as he hit me, he turned and ran back up into the stands, so I turned to give chase. Before I could take two steps, several cops took hold of my arms and began to lead me back to the dressing room. I told them, "I’m going to the ring. I’m gonna finish this damn match." Ernie Ladd was just standing in the ring, watching as it all went down. When I got into the ring, I told him, "Finish me, baby," and that’s exactly what he did. When the bell rang, Ernie was covered in blood. It wasn’t his, though. It was mine.

After we finished the match, the cop came over and said, "You’re one lucky son-of-a-bitch."

"Why is that?"

He said, "I couldn’t find my regular hard-clay nightstick when I left the house tonight, so I brought my old wooden one. If he had hit you with my clay stick, you would have been a dead man."

Bill Golden, who was Lee Fields’ booker in the Louisiana end of the territory at that time, called the newspaper and told them the story. The next

morning, they had a cartoon drawing of a night stick being broken over my head and the pieces flying through the air. That was really cool.

Bill Golden was a gimmick man, so he loved me. He took good care of me. Whenever Lee Fields wanted to get rid of me for some reason or another, Bill stood up for me. When I wrecked my car, I told him I had to leave and go to another territory. To make me stay, he offered to buy me a car. Lee Fields owned a used-car lot, so Bill bought one and gave it to me. When I couldn't find a place suitable for my wife and two children to live, Bill bought me a house trailer in Baton Rouge. It was a big, double-wide house trailer. Before that, he let me live in a three-bedroom house he owned in Lafayette. That was where my kids grew up and one of my children was born.

I was very fortunate. A lot of the boys talk so badly about the promoters, but they always took care of me. I have no complaints whatsoever. Whenever I wanted to try a new gimmick, they were more than willing to let me run with it. Granted, there were promoters who were straight-laced and stuck in the past, but even they were willing to give me an opportunity.

One night, I was wrestling Bobby Fields in Lafayette. During our match, I knocked him to the mat and started to put the boots to him. He finally made his big comeback and opened my head with a hardway. We went toe-to-toe and I opened him up, as well. We were both bloody as hell. At some point, we both fell to the mat and, as I was getting to my feet, I felt someone kick me in the ribs. It wasn't a hard kick, so I thought the promoter may have told Don Fields to come into the ring and get involved.

When I got to my feet, I saw someone I didn't know getting out of the ring. As I headed in his direction, he turned and saw me. He took off, running towards the front entrance. I left the ring and chased him right out into the area in front of the building, with everybody else in the arena right behind me. He continued his mad dash by running out into the street and to the other side.

Unfortunately, someone was driving past the building as I stepped down off the curb and ran right into me. All I heard was the screech of tires before he knocked me ass over teakettle. I really was pissed. When I stood up and

glared at the driver, he locked the doors and rolled up the windows. The cops were out front and saw it happen. When I turned around, it looked as if half the people in the arena had followed me outside, so I had to push my way through the crowd to get back to the ring. It was a stupid idea. I didn't even think about what I was doing and was halfway to the front doors before I realized I was surrounded by hundreds of wrestling fans … and every one of them was pissed off at me for what I had done to Bobby Fields before I left the ring. No sooner had I stepped into the building than some old man whacked me on the forehead with a twisted, mahogany walking cane. It split open my forehead like a ripe melon and blackened my eye. The police grabbed him and I continued my journey back to the ring. Bobby and I finished our match and I went back to the dressing room, but that time, I was surrounded by a whole cordon of police officers.

When I walked into the dressing room, Lee Fields was standing there with a big grin on his face. "Goddamn, Fargo! How did you do that?"

"How did I do what?"

"How did you hire those guys to do all that?"

"I didn't hire no-fuckin'-body! Those mother fuckers wanted to kill me!"

All that … for a $25 payoff.

Lee Fields loved that kind of thing. Several times, he suggested I go to a bar and start trouble. As far as the cops go, a guy named Lupo was the main man there in Lafayette. He'd arrest me and take me to jail so we'd get publicity.

In the late '50s and into the '60s, Lafayette and Baton Rouge were pretty rough towns, and the cops were just as mean as the bad guys. Lee Fields had a lot of connections in both of those towns. If he paid me $50 to do something to generate publicity, he'd call his contacts at the police station and tell them what I was going to do. They'd be there on the spot, ready to handle any problems that might come up. To make sure I didn't get hurt, they'd take me right to jail. Depending on the circumstances, such as

whether or not people were following us, they would either take me into the police station or drop me off somewhere down the road.

Bobby Fields and I drew houses everywhere we went, but especially in Baton Rouge. I loved to work with Bobby because he wanted you to hit him hard, and he returned in kind. We had hard-fought matches. We wrestled each other so many times that Lee finally came to us and said, "Look, you guys have been wrestling each other for a long time. It's going to get stale and eventually die. We need to do something different before it gets to that point because, when it dies, it's dead, and we won't be able to resurrect it."

I said, "That's fine. Let's save it. We can always come back and work something out of it later."

Lee said, "Fargo, we need to find someone else for you to wrestle."

At that time, Bob Kelly, who would eventually become a true legend in the Gulf Coast, was a referee. I said, "Put that skinny puke, Bob Kelly, out there. We'll make it."

Sure enough, Lee booked a series of matches between us and that turned the territory back on. Kelly was a lot like Bobby Fields. He loved to both give and receive hardways.

We taped TV at Channel 3 in Pensacola every Saturday. One afternoon, Kelly was scheduled to wrestle Rip Tyler [Dean Vaughn], but before the match began, I got into the ring and challenged Kelly. I had asked Tarzan Baxter [Leon Baxter], who was wrestling under a mask as the Professional, to follow me to the ring and keep me from getting to Kelly. In the meantime, Rip just stood in his corner of the ring and watched. From the look on his face, you could tell he wasn't happy because I was taking the spotlight off him. He didn't know I was going to do what I did. In fact, nobody knew. Not even Kelly. It was something I did on the spur of the moment.

Five minutes after Rip and Kelly began wrestling, I ran out to the ring. The announcer was great: "And here comes Donnie Fargo!" I jumped onto the ring apron, but before I could get through the ropes, Kelly knocked me off

the apron with a wild haymaker. I made another unsuccessful attempt to crawl in under the bottom rope, but Kelly kicked me out. The Professional, who had been trying to hold me back the entire time, pushed me back to the dressing room. Kelly and Rip resumed their match, but 30 seconds later, I ran out and scooted underneath the bottom rope. "Here comes Fargo again!" We fought tooth-and-nail for less than a minute before, once again, I was knocked out of the ring and the Pro pushed me backstage.

The referee made an attempt to restart the match between Kelly and Rip, but Kelly was smart enough to keep our angle going. Ignoring Rip, he told the referee to go get Fargo. When the referee stalled, Kelly left the ring, came back to the dressing room, and we went back out fighting. Meanwhile, Rip, who had been left standing in the ring like a third wheel, got out and tried to help restore order. We had one hell of a house that week, all stemming from that spontaneous angle.

When I talked to Kelly later that night, I told him, "I pulled a Buddy Rogers."

Shortly afterwards, I talked Bob Kelly into disguising himself and sitting in the audience. The people knew who he was, but I pretended I didn’t know. He attacked me when I came out to the ring.

In April 1966, Jim left Louisiana and I began teaming with Gene Stevens, who took on the name "Frank Dalton." Gene was a hang-around who wanted to get into wrestling, but until I came along, nobody wanted to help him. He didn’t weigh more than 180 pounds, so he didn’t fit the stereotype of a pro wrestler. When I first laid eyes on him, though, the first thought that came into my head was, "He’d make a perfect Dalton."

I trained Frank in a motel room. In those days, the beds were free-standing, so we could move them to one end of the room and put the mattress on the floor. For one solid week, I showed him all the moves on a mattress — the body slam, the biel, the piledriver — and I taught him how to apply and get out of holds. He learned so quickly.

Frank was one of the nicest guys in the world and we got along well, but our attitudes and approach towards life were as different as they could be.

Frank didn’t have any confidence in himself. Simply put, he was a downer. He was miserable all the time. I used to call him a 180-pound walking Valium. When I picked him up to go to a town, I would be in a great mood. I’d be half drunk and would have a good buzz going from smoking pot. I’d say something like, "I think we’ll have a good house tonight."

He’d say something like, "Yeah, but it’ll probably fuckin’ rain and people won’t wanna go out."

I’d say, "There’s not a cloud in the sky! Why do you think it’s gonna rain?"

"I don’t know, but it probably will. If it doesn’t, something else will happen."

It was like talking to Eeyore, the donkey from the Winnie the Pooh cartoons.

When he got into the ring, though, he became a completely different person. He was a Dalton and he played the part well, but outside the ring, he was always down in the dumps. He had a negative attitude. I had to be careful because, at times, it would rub off on me. We got to a point where, instead of trying to carry on a conversation with him, I’d turn up the radio and listen to music while he slept.

When Frank and I got together, the Dalton gimmick evolved from cowboys to that of bikers. Like always, I got tired of a gimmick after so long and I wanted to try something else. We didn’t change overnight. We just eased into it. It was a good change because we packed the houses in Louisiana. Don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying it was Frank and me alone. Bob Kelly and Bobby Fields were huge babyface draws in Louisiana.

One summer, Frank and I were living in a motel in Lafayette. Lenny Montana used to get up at six o’clock every morning and go to the pool. We’d be trying to sleep and we’d hear the diving board. Baa-bbbloom. Baa-bbbloom. Baa-bbbloom.

One afternoon, we stopped at a hardware store and bought a saw. Around three o’clock the next morning, we snuck out to the pool and cut the diving

board from the underside, leaving about a half inch of wood so the board didn’t break off completely. We fought sleep for the next three hours because we wanted to be awake when Lenny went to the pool. We had both dozed off when we were woken by crack, splash, splat. Lenny slid down into the water and the board came down on the top of his head. He was really mad and accused us of doing it, but we denied it. The boys had been staying at that motel for a long time, but due to that incident, the owner kicked us out and wouldn’t allow any wrestlers to stay there.

From April 1966 through July 1967, we wrestled almost exclusively in the Mobile and Louisiana territories. Eddie Graham, who was running the Florida territory for Cowboy Luttrall, brought us in for three weeks in August, and in October, we spent five weeks in Nashville when Lee Fields ran opposition against Nick Gulas.

In early 1966, we hooked up with Kenny Mack [Lawrence McMullen], another young wannabe who spent three years with us as our manager. By 1968, Lee Fields was billing us as the "Hell’s Angels," a gimmick that would come back to bite Kenny and me in the ass a while later. At the time, though, we loved the idea because we loved motorcycles and spent a lot of time at the motorcycle clubs in the area.

It’s funny, but up until recently, I didn’t remember us being billed as Hell’s Angels. In fact, I denied it to everyone who said anything about it. It wasn’t until I went to the Gulf Coast Wrestlers’ Reunion in Mobile in 2011 and saw an old poster from Gulfport, Mississippi — billing us as "Hell’s Angels, Frank and Jack Dalton, Manager Kenny Mack" — that I conceded the fact that it was true. I never would have allowed them to bill us as the "Hell’s Angels." The promoters did that of their own accord. If I had known they were doing that, I would have raised three kinds of hell.

The three of us used to stand outside behind the arena and drink beer. Once in a while, the fans would sneak around the side of the building and watch us. One day, a guy pulled up on a Harley. He was completely decked out in biker gear. I was in a feisty mood, so I pointed at his bike and asked, "Where’d you get the garbage can?"

Real bikers used to call people like him "full dressers" because they wore all kinds of garbage and decked out their bikes with all kinds of crap. He had flasher turn signals, a plastic saddle bag, stock tires, and all kinds of junk. My comment really pissed him off. He said, "Why are you calling my bike a garbage can?"

I said, "Because it’s a garbage can, man. Look at it. You have plastic bags hanging on the sides, blinker lights, turn signals. You’ve gotta get a chopper."

I got a lot of heat with the promoters because I mingled with the fans when I was outside the arena. I was a heel, so they wanted me to act indifferent and ignore them. I just wasn’t that kind of a guy. I didn’t like high society, so I hung around with the lower and middle-class people. That’s why I spent so much time in Louisiana. Most of those people were poor, but I liked to party with them because it made me aware of how good I had it. So many times, I’d bitch and complain about the payoffs, but when I got around the Cajuns — the people I called "coon-asses" — I realized how lucky I was. The promoters didn’t like it one bit, though. "Don’t mingle with the fans! Make them buy a ticket to see you?"

One time in Baton Rouge, a biker buddy of mine was talking to a group of the lady wrestling fans in front of the arena. At the time, Kenny, Frank and I owned a hearse and we drove it to all the towns. That was just another way for me to draw attention to myself. We pulled up and parked the hearse. I walked over to my friend and said, "Hey, man. Let me ride your bike."

I sat down on the bike and it fired up with one kick. I looked at my friend and grinned. "One kick! Alright, man!"

I rolled the bike forward a few feet to where my friend stood and said, "Get on."

"What?"

"Get on." When he started to sit down behind me, I said, "No, dumbass. Get on my fucking shoulders." He stood up on the seat and sat on my shoulders. I took off and we rode around that parking lot for several minutes. The fans

were going crazy and I was eating up the attention. Of course, as the old saying goes, all good things must come to an end. The office stooge (I can't remember who it was at the time because there were so many of them kissing Lee Fields' ass) came running out and said, "Lee Fields said he wants you to knock that shit off."

It was fun while it lasted, but I have to admit, Lee Fields was probably right. The Daltons were heels, and what we were doing wasn't getting us heat with the fans. If anything, it was making them like us. An hour later, though, we made up for it in the ring by doing something so dastardly, and so reprehensible, that the people forgot our hijinks and were ready to kill us.

I did several things on bikes that brought attention to myself, like the time I was in Montreal and someone dared me to ride naked. I took off my clothes, climbed onto the bike, and drove up a hill and back.

I never lost my cool with my opponents when we were wrestling, no matter what they did, but the fans really got under my skin. Of course, that was my fault because I used to work them into a rage. I'd yell at them and they'd scream insults back at me. My problem was, I worked myself up so much that I really would get mad. I was always going after one of the fans, especially in Mobile when they had the "colored" section of seats for the black fans. I'd run out into that section and they'd scatter in every direction.

One really bad near-riot we were involved in took place in Baton Rouge when Frank and I wrestled Ken Lucas and his wrestling brother, Chris Lucas [Paul Christy]. In those days, we had to go back to the dressing room between falls. We got a lot of heat in the first fall. All four of us were fighting after the finish of the match and the timekeeper was ringing the bell. Ken said, "You better not go back to the dressing room. Just stay in the ring."

"Nah, I'm goin' back."

As we made our way down the aisle, someone hit me in the head with a bottle. It split me wide open. That didn't bother me because I loved to bleed. I walked on like nothing happened, which was the best thing to do because it just added to my reputation of being a tough guy.

Before we left the dressing room to return to the ring for the next fall, the cops came in and said, "You guys better not go back out there. The people are really mad."

I said, "Man, if we don’t go back out there, they’ll think we’re a bunch of pussies, and when we come back next week, they’ll feel like they can get to us."

He said, "Are you sure about that, because we may not be able to protect you."

I said, "Well, officer. You just do your best to make sure nobody gets us from behind. I’ll go out first, and Frank and Kenny will follow. We’ll rush right through the crowd and be in the ring before they know it."

I gave Frank and Kenny some instructions on what we should do when we went out. We shoved open the door and went out screaming, hollering, and making growling sounds. You would have thought they opened up the gates to the loony bin. The people who were standing near the door backed right up and the crowd in the aisles parted like the Red Sea for Moses. We were supposed to win the second fall because Ken and Chris had won the first, but we let them beat us. That was the smartest thing to do. I didn’t want to go back to the dressing room again. It worked the first time. I didn’t think it would again. We were in Louisiana, where people regularly carried long knives and guns.

Over the years, people threw everything but the kitchen sink at us. I was so happy when they began to serve beer in plastic cups. Before that, they sold it in glass bottles and aluminum cans. We were always worried about getting hit by a bottle, which happened now and then. My worst fear, however, was being stabbed by a penknife.

One night, I saw an old man coming towards me with a knife in his hand. As he lunged at me with it, I put my hands up and across my chest and it stuck in my wrist. If I hadn’t blocked it, he would have stabbed me in the heart. The cops grabbed him and ushered me back to the dressing room, with the knife still stuck in my wrist.

Later, a cop came back to the dressing room and said, "We got the guy. Do you wanna press charges?"

"Nah. Let ‘im go. He’s an old guy. He didn’t hurt me."

The cop looked puzzled. "You got a knife wound."

"I know, but it’s not bad. I’ll keep his knife as a souvenir. That’ll probably be punishment enough."

It was a small, expensive, pearl-handled penknife. The old man probably used it to whittle figures out of wood. I don’t have that knife anymore, but I kept it for a long time.

I don’t remember too much about how we first met Kenny Mack, but our personalities just seemed to jell. I always kept my eyes open for new partners because I had learned that, no matter how good things were going, change was always inevitable. By the time I met Kenny, my former partners were all busy doing their own thing. Jackie was doing his shtick in Nashville, while Ray Stevens had made a huge name for himself in San Francisco. Jim Baugus was wrestling either as a single or teaming with people like Corsica Joe [as the Great Mephistos] or his real brother Jack. Even Frank was getting tired of life on the road. When he began to turn down bookings, I asked the promoters to let Kenny take his place. I never wanted to leave anything to chance. I wanted to be prepared for whatever might happen. I don’t look badly at my former partners for going out on their own. In wrestling, there were always other opportunities to pursue — opportunities that often meant more money — so nothing was permanent.

Kenny had really good ideas for matches and angles. When we made trips, we’d throw around ideas we could pitch to the promoters. He loved music, too, although our musical tastes were quite different. My tastes drifted towards country, while he enjoyed rock music. He talked for hours on end about the Woodstock music festival. When we were on the road, he sang along to the music that played over the radio, or he made up his own songs. He was good at it, too.

On August 27, 1968, Kenny, Frank and I were wrestling in Baton Rouge. While we were waiting to wrestle, two people approached us. It was obvious they were bikers by the way they were dressed, so the four of us immediately hit it off. Kenny and I lived our gimmick. We were never, never out of character, and we hung around with rough people. In my opinion, the best way to live our gimmick was to get right in there with them. Those people fit right in with our characters. When they asked us if we'd like to party with them after the matches, we told them we would love to. We didn't care who we went out with, as long as we knew there would be plenty of sex, drugs, and/or booze.

They took us to a house on the outskirts of Baton Rouge. When we walked in, I saw four people sitting huddled together on the floor, as if they were planning something. When they saw Kenny, Frank and me, all four of them jumped up. "Why are they here?"

"We invited them. They're okay."

The four people didn't seem too happy to have us there, but they soon warmed up to us. We had been smoking weed and drinking beer for about an hour when someone walked in and said something to a couple of the people in the room. Kenny, Frank and I couldn't hear what they were saying, but I heard them mention the word "initiation."

Apparently, they were going to initiate one of the men, Charles Cambre, into their group. When they told us what they were going to do, I said, "Hell, let me help."

The first thing they did was put him in the bathtub and turn on the shower. One of the girls brought a wastepaper basket into the room and put it on his head. Everybody, including Cambre, was laughing and clowning around. I remembered seeing a toilet seat in the side yard when we first got there, so I went outside, brought it inside, and put it over his head. Everybody laughed. I said, "Now you're king of the toilet." One of the other guys handed him a toilet plunger and said, "Here's your scepter."

About five minutes after we put him in the tub, we all went outside onto the front porch. Cambre started talking about wanting a Mohawk. I said, "I

know how to do that." I got some scissors and cut chunks of hair off both sides of his head, but I didn't try to make it look good. Everybody took a turn hacking at his hair. When we finished, his hair was a mess. We then made him run barefoot across broken beer bottles. When he reached the end of the broken glass, he turned around with his hands in the air and everybody applauded. After drinking more beer and smoking more pot, Kenny, Frank and I thanked them for a good time and left.

The next night, the three of us were booked to wrestle somewhere else. When we returned to the dressing room after our match, someone ran up to me and said, "Your wife called while you were wrestling. She sounded upset. You need to call her right away."

We left the arena without showering and drove to the nearest phone booth. When I asked my wife why she had called, she said, "Donnie, don't come home! Don't come anywhere near the house. In fact, don't even come near Baton Rouge. The cops are here. They have a warrant for you and Kenny's arrest."

When I asked her what it was all about, she said she didn't know. I didn't have any idea of what we might have done that would bring a warrant down on our heads, but I was really curious. I hopped in the car and filled Frank and Kenny in on what little I knew. We all were curious, so we decided to just drive by the house. What a mistake that was.

When we turned onto the street where I lived, we saw eight or nine patrol cars parked in front of our house with spotlights lighting up the house and yard. It looked like half the Baton Rouge police force was searching our house. We thought we'd be able to drive by unnoticed, but as we drove past the front of the house, I heard someone yell, "There they are!"

Frank was driving. He stomped on the accelerator pedal and took off. The cops nearest to the street jumped into their cars and began to chase us. Now, this will sound like I'm making this up, but I'm not. What happened next was like a scene right out one of Mack Sennett's Keystone Cops movies. As we turned down one road, we saw railroad tracks ahead, with a train rolling towards the crossing from about 50 yards away. It wasn't moving very fast, but it was close enough to the intersection that we weren't sure we could

make it across safely. Kenny and I both started to yell, "Floor it! Floor it! You can make it!" Frank hesitated at first, but then pushed the accelerator pedal to the floor and took off. We made it with seconds to spare, but the cops were far enough behind that they couldn’t get across before the train rolled through.

We looked back and broke into wild laughter. "We did it! We did it! We’re home free!" Our plan was to drive across a bridge into another county, so Frank turned right at the next intersection, which we thought led directly to the bridge. Instead, we were faced with two police cars parked nose-to-nose across the road. Our laughter died as quickly as it had begun. A policeman with a bullhorn stood in front of the two cars. "Step out of the car and put your hands in the air."

When we got out, they handcuffed Kenny and me. To this day, I have no idea why they let him go, but they looked at Frank and said, "We don’t want you. You can go." Frank immediately got into the car and drove off.

A short time later, Kenny and I were ushered into the East Baton Rouge Parish prison. They treated us really rough. They put me into a cell that had been dug into the ground, and a bright, overhead light shined down on me. About two feet from the center of the pit, the floor sloped downwards towards a hole. When I had to use the bathroom, I had to piss in the hole. The cell was nothing more than a concrete floor and walls — no chairs, no bench, no bed. I had to sleep on the hard concrete of that pit all night. There was no window and they left the light on all night.

For the next four days, the newspaper featured articles about the incident that had taken place the night before.

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Baton Rouge LA Advocate, Thursday, August 29, 1968

BOOK SIX HERE IN TORTURE INITIATION; VICTIM IN FAIR CONDITION
Two more men, both professional wrestlers, were arrested and charged with aggravated battery today in connection with the torture initiation of a 24-

year-old Baton Rouge man, members of the East Baton Rouge sheriff's office said.
Four others were arrested last night and also charged with aggravated battery.
The two arrested at 3 a.m. today at Beechwood Street and Airline Highway were identified as Lawrence K. McMullen, 23, La Rouge Motel, Florida Street, and Donald Kalt, 40, of 9955 Florida Blvd.
Kalt was identified as a wrestler who uses the name of "Jack Dalton" in his appearances. McMullen, also a wrestler, uses the name "Kenny Mack."
Bond for McMullen, Kalt and the four persons arrested earlier was set at $10,000 each by Dist. Judge Fred A. Blanche this morning. All six were taken to East Baton Rouge Parish prison.
Arrested last night were Johnny Garon, 18, of 7522 Seigan Lane; Rufus Ashley, 22, of 2510 Abdella; Frank Shoepper, 25, of 846 St. Louis; and Miss Patricia (Pat) Hickey, 18, also of 846 St. Louis.
Sheriff's deputies said more arrests are expected in connection with an investigation underway in the matter.
Hospitalized with second-degree burns, welts on his back, and a possible fractured rib is Charles Cambre, 24, of 3158 Iroquois St. This morning he was listed in "fair" condition by (a) medical spokesman at Our Lady of the Lake Hospital.
Cambre was "initiated" about 3 a.m. yesterday at 846 St. Louis St., deputies said.
Deputies said at first Cambre told them it was a group of LSU students who assaulted him.
Officers said their initial investigation indicates Cambre was put into a bathtub and held under water until he almost drowned. Then, they said, an attempt was made to punch out one of his eyes with a broomstick.
He was beaten with a motorcycle chain, urinated upon and then cigarette lighter fluid was poured upon him and ignited, deputies said.
While still in the bathtub, a motorcycle, along with several pieces of furniture, was placed on Cambre, police said. They said his hair was cut and that he was told not to seek any medical aid.
Deputies said that Cambre was told that the bloody clothing was wearing were his "original" clothes and that he was not ever to wash them, but to wear them all the time.
Authorities learned of the incident from officials at Our Lady of the Lake

Hospital where Cambre sought medical attention.
The investigation is being handled by deputies Tommy Baker, Jim Sanders and Bobby Tycer of the sheriff's office, and officer Buddy Garrison of the city police.

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Baton Rouge LA Advocate, Friday, August 30, 1968

TORTURE HERE SPURS MORE JAILINGS
A barefoot walk through broken glass, a sex orgy, the discovery of dope and the arrest of two more persons were reported Thursday by deputies of East Baton Rouge Sheriff Bryan Clemmons' office in connection with the alleged torture initiation.
Investigating officers said Charles Cambre, 24, 3158 Iroquois Street, the victim of the initiation rites who now is in Our Lady of the Lake Hospital with second-degree burns, welts on his back and a possible fractured rib, also had been forced to walk barefoot over broken glass.
They said the sex orgy preceded the rites and they were seeking a girl who was involved in it.
According to their report, central nervous system stimulants have been found in the apartments of Miss Patricia (Pat) Hickey, 18, 846 St. Louis, and Frank Shoepper, 25, of the same address – two others who were arrested Wednesday night and charged with aggravated battery.
The other two arrested at the same time were Johnny Garon, 18, of 7522 Seigan Lane, and Rufus Ashley, 22, of 2510 Abdella.
The two men arrested Thursday are both professional wrestlers and were booked on the same charge, the officers said. They were picked up at Airline Highway and Beechwood Street at 3 a.m. and were identified as Lawrence K. McMullen, 23, LaRouge Motel, Florida Street, and Donald Kalt, 40, 9955 Florida Blvd.
Deputies said Kalt uses the name "Jack Dalton" and McMullen goes by the name "Kenny Mack" in their appearances.
The officers also said more arrests are expected in connection with the case.

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While Kenny and I were in jail, Frank called Bill Golden to see if he could do anything to get us released. Bill was all too glad to help because I was booked in the main event that night [Thursday, August 29] in Chalmette [an east New Orleans suburb]. They had a really good advance sale and Bill didn't want anything to hurt the momentum we had going in the town. Bill paid my bail and I was released from custody. Kenny had to stay in until the next afternoon because Bill didn't have enough money to get us both out.

As I was walking out, two detectives were standing behind the booking counter. They looked angry. One of them said, "So, you got out, huh?"

As we got into Bill's car, he told us the detectives were wrestling fans who sat ringside every week in Baton Rouge. They were mad because they hated the Daltons, just as most people did in that part of the country. We had a lot of heat, both in the ring and out.

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Baton Rouge LA Advocate, Saturday, August 31, 1968

WRESTLERS ARRESTED IN BR FREED, MATCH IS SCHEDULED
Two wrestlers jailed here in connection with the torture initiation of a 24-year-old man were free on $10,000 bond Friday night.
Both are scheduled to take part in a wrestling match in Baton Rouge Tuesday night.
Donald Kalt, 40, and Lawrence K. McMullen, 23, were arrested along with four other persons on aggravated battery charges stemming from the initiation of a local man.
Kalt, 9955 Florida Blvd., was freed on bond Thursday night and McMullen, LaRouge Motel, Florida Street, made bond Friday. The other four were being held Friday night in the East Baton Rouge Parish jail. Bond for all of them was set at $10,000.
The other four are Johnny Garon, 18, of 7522 Seigan Lane; Rufus Ashley, 22, of 2510 Abdella; Frank Shoepper, 25, of 846 St. Louis; and Miss Patricia (Pat) Hickey, 18, of 846 St. Louis.
The victim of the so-called initiation, Charles Cambre, 24, of 3158 Iroquois St., received second-degree burns and other injuries.
Kalt, who uses the name "Jack Dalton" in wrestling, and McMullen, who

uses the name "Kenny Mack," are scheduled to wrestle in a match Tuesday night at the Teamsters Hall on Airline Highway.
Bonds for both of them were arranged through a professional bondsman who said he was acting for Kalt's agent and McMullen's wife.

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Baton Rouge LA Advocate, Sunday, September 1, 1968

INITIATION PROBE BRINGS ARREST TO TEAMSTER
Baton Rouge Teamster Terry George Saturday joined the list of persons jailed here in connection with the torture-initiation of a 24-year-old man.
George, 23, was booked on a charge of aggravated battery and ordered held on $10,000 bond. His address was given as 5870 McClelland Drive.
Also jailed for aggravated battery Saturday was Gerald D. Northrop, 20, of 5831 McClelland Drive. His bond was set at $1,500.
Deputies said George and Northrop were present when Charles Cambre, 24, of Iroquois St., was put through a torturous initiation this past Wednesday.
George is one of six men charged in the attack on the W.O. Bergerson crews in Plaquemine early this year; and he is also one of six Teamsters who charged in federal court they are marked for murder by the Labor-Management Commission of Inquiry.

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In typical fashion, the newspapers didn’t get the facts straight. I have no idea why they printed some of the things they did. In the first article, they said Cambre "was held under water until he almost drowned," and "someone made an attempt to punch out one of his eyes with a broomstick." They said he was "beaten with a motorcycle chain, urinated upon, and … (had) cigarette lighter fluid poured upon him and ignited."

None of that was true. In fact, the newspaper carried stories about the incident every day for the next three days, and not one of the so-called reporters mentioned any of those things after the first article. We did make Cambre run across broken beer bottles, but we didn’t do any of the other things to him.

Now, to be honest, we were doing a lot of drugs at the time, so my memory isn't the best when it comes to remembering details, but I do remember what happened that night. When Kenny and I left the house, the guy was just fine. Somebody may have given him a severe beating after we left, but we knew nothing about it. I doubt very seriously that the other people there did it because they were friendly with Cambre, and from my point of view, they all seemed to be very close friends.

No doubt, the first four people arrested told the police that Kenny and I were involved. Normally, bikers are smart enough to keep their mouths shut, but the police may have intimidated them into giving them the names of everyone who had been there that night.

The following week, Bill Golden set us up with a lawyer, who told us his services would cost us $10,000 each. Frank said, "Oh, god! How are we going to come up with that kind of money?"

The lawyer said, "That's for you to figure out. Your trial is set for — (date).

About two weeks after the incident took place, Cambre was seriously injured in a "non-collision motorcycle accident." Witnesses to the accident said they saw nobody else around, but I thought it was very suspicious that he would have a serious accident shortly after everything went down.

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Baton Rouge LA Advocate, Tuesday, September 10, 1968

CYCLE ACCIDENT LEAVES BR MAN CRITICALLY HURT
DENHAM SPRINGS – Charles Ronnie Cambre, 24, 3158 Iroquois St., Baton Rouge, is in critical condition at Dixon Memorial Hospital, suffering from head injuries suffered in a non-collision motorcycle accident on Hwy. 16 near French Settlement.
Livingston authorities said Cambre, who last month was the victim of a torture initiation, was brought to the hospital here about 3 p.m. Sunday after he was reportedly found lying on the side of the road in an unconscious condition. He underwent surgery and had not regained consciousness Monday.

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Baton Rouge LA Advocate, Friday, September 13, 1968

CYCLE VICTIM REMAINS IN SERIOUS SHAPE
DENHAM SPRINGS -- Charles Ronnie Cambre, 24, 3158 Iroquois St., Baton Rouge, remained unconscious and in serious condition at Dixon Memorial Hospital here today with head injuries received in a motorcycle accident Sunday.
The Livingston Parish sheriff's office reported Cambre lost control of his cycle while riding on La. 16 near French Settlement.

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Baton Rouge LA Advocate, Saturday, September 14, 1968

CYCLE ACCIDENT VICTIM REPORTED STILL SERIOUS
DENHAM SPRINGS – The condition of Charles Ronnie Cambre, 24, injured in a motorcycle accident Sunday, remained serious Friday night ... Doctors felt he "may have improved some."

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Baton Rouge LA: October 22, 1968 (Tuesday)
The Advocate reports Charles Ronnie Cambre, 24, remains unconscious at Baton Rouge General Hospital ... "Authorities were interested in learning the details of the accident because Cambre earlier had been the victim of an alleged initiation torture."

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Baton Rouge LA Advocate, Wednesday, October 23, 1968

BATON ROUGEAN STILL IN COMA AFTER WRECK
... Investigating officers said witnesses told them no one else was involved in the accident, but in view of the previous incident they were keeping the investigation open.

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The last thing Kenny and I heard about Charles Cambre was that he had died in the hospital from the injuries he suffered.

Strangely enough, this story didn’t really come to a conclusion until just a few days before Scott Teal and I wrapped up this book. At that time, J Michael Kenyon found an obituary for Charles Cambre — dated June 4, 1996 — almost 28 years after the accident!

When Scott called and said, "The guy didn’t die," you could have knocked me over with a feather. All those years, I thought he was dead, and he was still alive.

When Kenny and I called the wrestling office to see if they had an idea of what we could do to get the money for the lawyer, they told me Dick the Bruiser had called. I don’t know who did it or why, but somebody sent Bruiser a copy of the newspaper articles about the incident. Bruiser had friends everywhere, so someone must have mailed them to him and said, "Look what happened in Baton Rouge."

A few days later, Bruiser called. "Kalt!" He always called me Kalt. Twenty years after I quit using that name, he still called me Kalt. "Hey, Kalt! I hear you have a pretty good tag team. How would you and your partner like to come up here to Indianapolis and work for us?"

I had been in Louisiana for three solid years and I definitely needed a change, so it didn’t take more than a second to make up my mind and say, "Hell, yeah." All of a sudden, the thought hit me that we might not be able to leave the state. "If we can," I added.

Bruiser told us to ask our lawyer what we were allowed to do and to call him back. We told our lawyer we had a big break to wrestle in Indianapolis and that would give us the money we needed to pay him. He said, "Well, I’ll need you to sign some papers before you go." He set us up with a payment plan and had us sign some papers. "You’d better send my money every month … on the dot!"

We were good to our word. Every time Kenny and I got paid, we each sent the lawyer anywhere from a $1,000 to $2,000.

When I left Louisiana and went to Indianapolis in 1968, I wound up shelving the Dalton gimmick for good. I sold Buddy Fuller my guns, a decision I regret to this day. I should have kept them. They were pearl-handled, nickel-plated, fast-draw Colt pistols. They were beautiful guns. I had them custom made — modified, balanced, and the front sights taken off. They would have sold for a lot of money. He was booking in Georgia when I sold them.

The reason I sold my guns was because I didn't have any money and I needed the cash to get to Indianapolis. I wish I could get back into gun-twirling. The old West will always be a part of me. I still try to twist the guns around, but my hands don't work like they used to. When I saw Buddy's son, Ron Fuller, at the 2013 reunion in Mobile, I was going to ask him if I could get them back, but before I could even ask, he asked me, "Fargo, remember those guns you sold my dad?"

I said, "Yeah."

He said, "Somebody stole them out of his car."

When we pulled away from Baton Rouge, I felt so relieved to leave it all behind me.

What I didn't know at the time, though, was that Kenny and I were driving out of the frying pan … and into the fire.

Chapter 18
The Ten-Penny Nail

Kenny Mack and I arrived in Indianapolis in October 1968. Frank Dalton didn’t go with us because Bruiser only wanted two guys and he thought Frank was too small. That was okay because Frank didn’t really want to leave home, anyway. Frank was a homesteader. His wife, family, and girlfriends all were in Louisiana, and he had no real interest in going out on the road.

At the time, the Indianapolis territory was owned and run by Dick the Bruiser and Wilbur Snyder. They called their promotion the World Wrestling Association, or as people referred to it most often, the WWA. I’m not sure why Dick took it upon himself to call me and invite me to wrestle in his territory. I believe it was because he was somewhat of a rebel, and he may have seen a kindred spirit in me. What I do know is that Wilbur Snyder did not want us up there. He didn’t like us before he met us. We overheard him tell Bruiser, "They’re bad news, Dick." But it didn’t matter what Snyder said. Bruiser was determined to push us as unbeatable monsters.

There was as much difference between Bruiser and Snyder as there was space between Jupiter and Mars. They were nothing alike. They were like night and day. It was comical to watch them together.

Bruiser was a brute. He was wild. He lived on the edge. He ate chicken with his fingers and wiped his fingers on his shirt. He drank beer and whiskey from the bottle. Snyder, on the other hand, was from high society. He was prim and proper. He picked the meat off the bones with his fork and wiped his fingers on the napkin he had tucked into his shirt collar. He sipped on cocktails and margaritas with his little finger sticking up into the air.

Please keep in mind that, for the purposes of this book, when I refer to Bruiser in reference to the overall promotion, I mean both Bruiser and Snyder. Bruiser and Snyder were partners, but I think Dick called the shots

because, in the weeks leading up to our October 11 debut on Indianapolis TV, Bruiser gave us a big build-up. Bobby Heenan, who was the principal manager in the territory, talked about us every week on television. He was really over the top in his delivery. "They're coming! They're coming! The Chain Gang is coming to Indianapolis! They drive a hearse! They carry machine guns! They're like nothing you've ever seen before!"

What a super job they did of promoting our arrival. The problem was, we thought we were going in as the Dalton brothers. We didn't know anything about machine guns or chain gangs. When people think of a chain gang, they think of prisoners chained together who dug ditches, broke rocks, or built roads.

When we had our first meeting with Bruiser, he said, "We want you guys to be wild, crazy, and mean as snakes. And forget the Daltons. From here on out, you're Jack and Frank Dillinger!" He built us up like we were animals or psychos. He took pictures of Kenny and me and printed them in the arena programs with headlines like, "Wrestling's Worst Cancer" and "Their Very Existence Thrives on Hate." Kenny and I jumped on the gimmick. We loved it.

From that day on, we lived our gimmick 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Our wives didn't like it, but they knew we were committed to the believability of our business.

One afternoon after we had been there for a few weeks, Dick said, "Hey, you guys. There's a place in the mountains where we can go ride three-wheelers." Man, that was right down our alley. We went up there several times with Bruiser to ride and drink beer. We had no worries and no cares. We spent the time having fun and getting drunk.

Until one day when Bruiser pulled a fast one on us. He called to ask if we'd like to go deer hunting. We had never done that, so Frank and I both jumped at the chance. We got on our motorcycles, rode over to his house, and he took us up into the mountains. He brought two rifles. I thought it was a bit odd that he didn't have a rifle for himself and I even asked him why he didn't. "I've reached my limit for the season. I'm going to let you guys

hunt. Go up to the top of that hill over there. When you get to the top, you'll see another hill. Climb to the top of it and wait."

When I asked him how long we were supposed to wait, he said, "Until you hear the deer coming. I'm going to walk around and spook them in your direction."

He gave us one bullet apiece and said, "You guys are always bragging about being such good shots. Let's see what you can do."

Kenny and I climbed to the top of the first hill, down the other side, and up to the top of the second hill. When we got there, we sat down to wait … and wait … and wait. I asked Kenny, "Do you hear anything yet?"

"No, I don't."

"I don't, either."

If we had been in a movie, you would have thought we were Laurel and Hardy. The scenario was right out of one of their movies. We sat … and sat … and sat. Every few minutes, we'd repeat what we had said earlier. "Do you hear anything?"

"No, I don't."

"I don't, either."

Neither one of us wore a watch, so we had no idea of how much time went by. Finally, I noticed the sun dipping down towards the horizon. "Hey, it's starting to get dark."

And then it began. "What's Bruiser doing?"

"How long have we been up here?"

Until finally, Kenny said, "I don't know about this, man. We'd better head back and see if we can find Bruiser before it gets too dark."

We didn’t have to wrestle that night, so we didn’t have anything scheduled, but the last thing we wanted was to be lost in the mountains. We got up and began to walk back. When we got to the top of the first hill, we looked down at the dirt road where Bruiser had left us … and nobody was there. His car was gone. "What the hell? That son-of-a-bitch left us."

We went up to the camp where the forest rangers lived and told them about our situation. They kept a straight face for a few seconds and just looked back at us, as if trying to comprehend what we were trying to tell them. They suddenly broke out in laughter. They must have laughed for five minutes. I was starting to get pissed. "What’s so funny?"

They said, "You’re just another in a long line of rubes that Bruiser snookered into sitting up on that hill," and proceeded to laugh again.

I was just about to explode when a curtain behind the rangers moved, and out walked Bruiser. He had been hiding behind the curtain all that time. Apparently, he was good friends with the park rangers and spent a lot of time with them when he was in the mountains. Kenny and I felt like complete dumbasses. I was standing there with the rifle in one hand and the single bullet in the other. Finally, Kenny and I both had to laugh. That was one fantastic rib, and I honestly believe Bruiser would have left us on that mountain all night if we hadn’t returned when we did.

Another time, Bruiser called and asked us to come over to his house. To get there, we had to drive up over the top of a steep rise and down the other side. Kenny and I were in the hearse and that sucker wasn’t built for maneuverability. What we didn’t know was that Bruiser was peeking over the top of that rise. When he saw us coming in the distance, he ran back down the hill and climbed into a huge four-wheeler he owned. He timed it perfectly. He came roaring up onto the crest of that rise just before we reached it on the other side. He scared the hell out of us. Kenny jerked the wheel to one side and we careened down the other side of the rise on the shoulder of the road. That was a funny rib to him, but we honestly could have been killed or, at the very least, seriously injured. We did have a good story to tell the boys that night, though.

Bruiser invited us to a party one night. He wanted to pull a rib on Bob Luce, the promoter in Chicago. He wanted me to show up dressed as a woman. He gave me a wig and asked me to buy a dress. My wife painted my toe nails and put makeup on my face. I was always ready to participate in a good rib, so I really got into the part … until she said, "You should shave your legs."

"The hell with that!"

I wore a veil (so Luce couldn't see my face), sunglasses, a hat, long, white gloves, and jewelry. I have to say, I looked pretty good. I hadn't been able to find high heels big enough to fit my feet, so I wore flip-flops.

Bruiser had set up the rib by telling Luce he had a hooker coming to the house for him. When I got there, I stood outside while the boys told Luce that a woman at the front door was asking for him. They told him, "She doesn't want to come in because she's nervous." He came out and we convinced him that I was a woman. Bruiser walked out and whispered in my ear, "Luce wants to take the veil down so he can see what you look like. I'll tell you when." When I moved the veil aside and smiled, a look of disgust crossed his face and he muttered, "Oh, my god."

Kenny and I got to work with both Bruiser and Crusher [Reginald Lisowski] while we were there. Working with those two guys was like working with two rhinoceroses, or two tanks. Kenny and I were pretty beefed up at the time, but they were monsters that seemed to be made of stone.

One of the other legendary characters in Indianapolis was Moose Cholak [Edward Cholak]. Moose had a real moose head that he had prepared so he could wear it on his head. Moose was a big, big man, and the moose head made him look like more of a monster than he already was. He had it fixed so it would fit over his head and the bottom would rest on his shoulders. It didn't have straps to secure it to his body. He just balanced it. When he came into the arena or TV studio, he would make a moose sound.

One day, he was booked on TV. The ring, as they were at most television studios, was smaller than a ring you would normally find in an arena. On

that particular day, the ropes hadn't been tightened as much as they should have been. Moose was tall enough that he could step over the top rope. He brought one leg over the rope and into the ring and stopped. He gave his moose call … Mo-ooooo! When he tried to bring his back leg over the rope, the heel of his foot caught and he stumbled forward and spun around to face back towards the ropes. I thought he was going to be okay when he caught his balance and began to straighten up … until, all of a sudden, the moose head began to tip backwards. The weight of that head pulled him straight over onto his back. His feet were inches from the ropes on one side of the ring and his head was almost touching the ropes on the other side.

Any other promoter would have gone ballistic and probably would have fired a wrestler who did something like that on television, but not Dick the Bruiser. Dick loved everything and anything that went wrong. He loved things like that. When people ask me who my favorite promoter was, hands down, it was Dick the Bruiser. He let us do anything we wanted. Nothing bothered him and he enjoyed every moment of his life.

Moose kept wearing the moose head, even when the promoters advised him not to. Kenny and I picked it up one time. It was one heavy sucker. I don't know how Moose was able to handle it, even with his 300-pound frame as support.

Moose and I both loved our Scotch whiskey. One day, when we were at the airport, we started drinking. When they called out our flight number, we didn't hear them, so we just kept drinking … and drinking … and drinking. Finally, we heard a flight number that sounded like ours, so we ran to the gate. Well, we staggered to the gate. Can you imagine Moose Cholak, at six-foot-two and weighing more than 300 pounds, trying to run through a crowded airport when he was drunk. I'm not sure he could have done it easily when he was sober. When we reached the gate, they checked our tickets and told us our plane had left 30 minutes before.

We missed the show, but neither of us really cared. We went back to the bar and stayed there for several hours, drinking bloody Marys. We told Bruiser we got stuck in traffic and our plane had left by the time we got to the airport.

I was introduced to steroids for the first time while I was in Indianapolis. I don’t know how many people remember the old TV show Mission Impossible, but an actor named Peter Lupus played a strongman character on the show. He was from Indianapolis and worked out at the gym where I did. He introduced me to a man there that everyone called "Big John." John gave me all the information I needed to get started. To this day, I couldn’t tell you what it was I took. I didn’t care. All I remember is the capsules would have choked a horse, and all I needed to know was that the pills would make me big.

One guy gave me a pill and I asked him what it was. "Oh, it’s a horse pill."

"What do you mean?"

"We get them from a veterinarian."

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

I don’t know if he was ribbing me or not. All I knew was they made me feel so strong. They gave me a weird sensation because I could almost feel myself changing and growing bigger. I beefed up to 250 pounds in no time at all. The drugs made me stronger than I had ever been. I could bench press 500 pounds and do ten reps of behind-the-neck military presses with 275. I used to sit in the car and smoke a joint before a workout with the guy I used to train with. I never asked him what it was he gave me, but he handed me a white pill. When I told him I didn’t know what to do with it, he said, "Just put it under your tongue and let it melt." I did what he told me and sat there until I began to feel a high. He said, "You feel okay?"

"Yeah. I’m ready to work out."

"I am, too."

When we went into the gym, I felt stronger than I had at any time in my life. I used 100-pound dumbbells to warm up. The gym had dumbbells that weighed 130 pounds. The guys today handle those easily, and I think they do it without steroids, but the pills helped me, so I kept taking them. I took them for a long time. They were easy to get under the table back then. I

never, ever got them from a doctor. I trusted the people who gave them to me. Now, I’m not telling anybody that was a good thing to do. I didn’t suffer any long-lasting adverse effects, but I was just one of the lucky people who got away with it. I did, however, get very irritable, which is one of the side effects of steroids. They make you want to fight at the least provocation. In a way, those aggressive feelings helped me in my business. The aggression fit my character. I didn’t have to act angry because I was. But it also affected my marriage and relationships with other people.

The boys used to ask me during that time, "What the fuck is wrong with you, Fargo?"

I didn’t know what was wrong with me. I felt better than I ever had in my life. One day, I decided it was time to quit … and that’s exactly what I did. I quit cold turkey. Years later, when I was doing a lot of speed, I quit that exactly the same way. When I got off the roids, I lost weight pretty quickly, but I worked out hard and kept myself cut up.

On one of our first nights in the territory, Snyder told Bruiser, "Make sure those guys don’t come to the arena with alcohol on their breath. And they need to start taking a shower. The guys are complaining."

I can’t fault Snyder because we really did stink. We were playing the part. And, to be honest, we did it because we wanted to get under Snyder’s skin. It got to a point, though, where I began to worry about getting fired because Snyder really had it in for us. On the way to a town one night, we drank peach brandy and beer. Kenny was listening to the radio and singing his songs. We were having a great time. All of a sudden, it hit me. I said, "Oh, man."

Kenny said, "What?"

I said, "We’re gonna smell like beer and wine. Let me smell your breath." Sure enough, his breath reeked of alcohol. I told him, "Stop at one of the stores in the shopping center." We went in and bought raw onions, garlic, and limburger cheese. "This’ll kill the smell."

When we got back on the road, we ate the onions, garlic and cheese. We also rubbed the cheese in our armpits. We smelled terrible … but you couldn't smell the alcohol, and that's all we were worried about. When we walked into that dressing room, Snyder and Bruiser were sitting on a bench, discussing the card for the night. We nodded our greetings and proceeded to change our clothes. We hadn't been there more than a minute when Wilbur looked up and said, "Oh, wow! What is that smell? What the hell did you two roll in?" I'm sure Bruiser knew we had been up to something because he started to laugh.

The funny thing about it was, we couldn't smell each other. Our sense of smell vanished when we began to eat the onions and garlic. The combination of the onions, garlic and cheese with the alcohol must have been really bad, though. Bruiser laughed and growled a few words before getting up and leaving us with Snyder. I thought Snyder was going to ream us out, but he just shook his head, stood up, and followed Bruiser.

Bruiser worked closely with Verne Gagne, the promoter in the Minneapolis territory. They swapped talent back and forth to keep new, fresh faces coming in and out of the two territories. After we had been wrestling in Indianapolis for six months, Bruiser told us we were booked in Chicago on April 8. Kenny and I rode our motorcycles from Indianapolis to the Windy City. Halfway through the trip, we stopped to take a leak in an alley. While we were whizzing, Kenny said, "Hey, look!"

I looked over to where he was pointing and saw a rat that looked like it had been dead for just a short time. I'm pretty sure it had been run over by a car because the head was in perfect shape, but the body had been crushed. I walked over, picked it up, and took it back to the car. Kenny said, "What're you gonna do with that?"

I grinned and said, "Let's have some fun."

I came up with an idea that I thought would be hilarious. I took the rat and placed it, with its feet facing outwards, on my chest. I zipped up my jacket halfway and let the head, neck, and front paws of the rat hang out and over the spot where the zipper stopped. I drove all the way to Chicago with that rat hanging out of my jacket.

Before we left Indianapolis, Bruiser had called to say he wanted to meet us as soon as we got to the Amphitheater in Chicago. What I didn't know was that he planned to introduce us to Verne. I thought he wanted to talk over some ideas for the upcoming weeks. When we got there, we went right to the dressing room. As expected, Bruiser was there, but I didn't know Wilbur would be with him. Bruiser said, "You guys are on time. Good. I want you to meet Verne Gagne and Wally Karbo." [Wally Karbo was a co-founder of the American Wrestling Association promotion and Gagne's partner.]

When he motioned behind us, we turned around and held out our hands. I had completely forgotten about the rat. Gagne stuck out his hand, but pulled it back just as quickly. "Oh, my god! What is that?"

At first, I didn't realize what he was talking about, but it quickly dawned on me. Without missing a beat, I said, "Oh, that's my pet rat. Do you wanna see him?"

I took one ear between my forefinger and thumb and lifted it up and out. When he saw the crushed, bloody body, a look of disgust came over his face. He turned right around and, as he began to walk out, said, "Oh, god. Forget it. Forget it."

Bruiser and Snyder, of course, were hot on his heels. "Hey, Verne! Come back! These guys can make you money."

Bruiser came back less than a minute later and asked, "For God's sake! Where the fuck did you get that? That ain't rubber, is it?"

"Hell, no, Dick. What would I be doing carrying around a rubber rat?"

"Goddammit! Why are you carrying a dead rat around? Go wash that son-of-a-bitch off."

I did just what he said. I took it in the bathroom, washed it off, and put it back where I had carried it originally. I went back to see Dick and he said, "You guys might have blown a good thing. I had you two fixed up in Minnesota and you come in here to meet the promoter with a dead rat."

While Bruiser talked, we could hear Snyder pleading with Gagne. "They'll draw you a lot 'a money, Verne. Just give 'em a chance."

Somehow, Snyder calmed him down and convinced him to come back into the dressing room to talk with us.

One characteristic of the Chain Gang was to be happy-go-lucky. Anytime Kenny and I heard the word "party," we made sure we found out where it was going to be held because we were going to be there. We loved to party and drink beer. I often wonder if Kenny's parents had ever seen that side of him, or whether he was a calm, polite kid when he was at home.

Kenny and I had several body piercings. We didn't do it like people do it today, though. We didn't go to a doctor or a piercing studio. We did it ourselves. I pushed safety pins through my nipples. No pain killer, no anesthetic, not even a professional tool that pierced the skin. I simply pinched my nipple and shoved the pin through. I did the same thing to another of my body parts, which I'll get to in a bit.

I did the same thing to my third (and current) wife, Margie. I pushed safety pins through her nipples. She wore them for a long time. When she was working in the clubs as a titty dancer, she'd connect a beer tap to one of them. Kenny and I did the same thing to our foreheads. My head was so numb from being hit that I could take a safety pin and push it through my eyebrows without feeling too much discomfort. They were big safety pins, too. At one time, I had safety pins through my forehead, my nipples, and my ears. In those days, we used to string the pull tabs from beer cans together. I'd get a two-foot-long string of them and connect one end to the pin in my ear, the other to the pin in my forehead.

Now, the next part of this story is absolutely true. I know you won't believe it, but you can ask just about anybody who knew me in the day whether or not it's true.

Piercing my forehead, ears, and eyebrows wasn't good enough for me. A lot of the people I hung out with did that. I took it one step further and pierced my penis.

That’s right. I didn’t misspell the word "pencil." I meant what I said and I said what I meant. I pierced my "penis," as in tallywhacker, dick, weiner, bologna pony, and wanker.

I was working for Bruiser at the time. Dick loved to go up into the mountain and he knew all the rangers and people who worked for the national parks. In the park where he spent a majority of his time, he was given access to a huge room, deep in the mountains, where corporations and private individuals held parties.

On Christmas day 1968, Dick hosted a Christmas party for all the wrestlers. He didn’t allow wives or girlfriends to come along. It was strictly for the boys and he supplied unlimited food, beer, and champagne. He didn’t allow drugs. In fact, Bruiser was one of the guys who were adamant that there would be no drugs used in his territory. I’m not saying they weren’t used, but we made sure he didn’t know about it when we did.

Now, I’ll be the first to admit that Kenny and I were wild. His poor parents and friends didn’t know about the lifestyle we were living, which was the life of bad asses who did crazy things. This night would be no exception.

Since women weren’t allowed at the party, I felt like I was free to do anything I wanted to do. In fact, everybody there expected me to do something new and unique. I took it upon myself to always do something to get attention whenever I was with the boys. In other words, they expected me to do something stupid. After getting drunk, I began to look for something to do. I made a thorough search of the building to see if there was anything I could use to get everybody’s attention. Suddenly, I saw exactly what I had been looking for … a hammer and a nail.

"Hey, everybody! Come over here!"

When everybody had gathered around the picnic table where I stood, I pulled down my pants, draped my penis out onto the table, stretched out the skin on one side … and placed the point of the nail on the skin. Kenny, who was holding the hammer, proceeded to drive the nail through my skin and into the wood. I only said two words: "Oh, fuck!" That son-of-a-bitch kept

hammering, even after the nail was a quarter inch into the table. "All right! All right! That’s enough!"

I raised my arms, put my hands over my head with my palms facing outward, and began to do a dance. The boys were going nuts. They were laughing so hard and loud. Bruiser and Bob Luce both laughed so hard that they were bent over with their hands on their knees.

It just so happened that Wilbur Snyder chose that exact moment to walk into the room … with his wife hanging onto his arm. She took one look, stopped walking abruptly, and her mouth fell open. They turned right around and fast-walked out. Once again, I heard the saying from Snyder that I had heard so many times before: "Fire that son-of-a-bitch!"

Bruiser didn’t take any notice. He couldn’t stop laughing. Of course, Bruiser had a great sense of humor. He loved to laugh and he saw humor in everything.

When someone told him Snyder and his wife had walked out, Bruiser ran out after them. Apparently, he couldn’t convince them to stay because he came back in just a few seconds later with a big grin on his face.

And while I’m talking about Bruiser, I have to say this. I’m not putting the blame on Bruiser because Kenny and I loved doing off-the-wall things, but Bruiser instigated a lot of the things we did. He would dare us to do things that would offend or shock people.

Now, I know it must have been painful (especially for you men) to have read the paragraph about hammering the nail through my penis skin. It gets worse.

The one thing I hadn’t thought about was, after I had it nailed to the table, how I was going to get the nail out. It was a big ten-penny nail and Mr. Johnson was really beginning to ache. Kenny said, "Just pull it up and off the nail."

"You dumbass! The nail has a head on it!"

The claw on the hammer wouldn’t work alone because the head of the nail was a good two inches in the air. Kenny looked around until he found a piece of metal that was about an inch thick. He laid it next to my penis so he could lay the hammer over it and get leverage. By the time he was ready to remove the nail, my dick felt numb. I’d soon find out, however, that it was anything but.

The first couple of attempts failed. The nail was embedded so far into the table that it wouldn’t come out, and every time Kenny yanked on that hammer, it sent jolts of pain through me. Somebody came up with the idea of putting oil on it, hoping it would seep down between the point of the nail and the wood, and lubricate it enough that it would slip right out. Kenny finally pulled out the nail. It was painful as hell, but it was a relief to get it out. Since everyone was watching, I slipped the nail back through the hole in my penis. I laughed and said, "Hell, it’s pierced now. I might as well keep it that way."

When word got out about what I had done, I couldn’t go anywhere without people asking me for a repeat performance. I couldn’t begin to count the number of times I nailed my penis to a table, a bar, a bench in a dressing room, or a fence post.

I one-upped myself a few years later when I was back in Pensacola, but I’m getting ahead of myself. That story will have to wait for a later chapter.

That wasn’t the end of the story. Wally Karbo had a kid named Dennis. We called him Dennis the Menace. He was a really nice kid, but he wasn’t a wrestler. He was a gopher. He’d get coffee and run errands.

We had another party up there a month or two later. The boys had all been drinking and nobody was paying too much attention to us. Kenny and I were bored and wanted to do something to liven up the party. While Bruiser was talking to some people at the ranger station, we got one of those car creepers that mechanics use to lie on and roll up under the chassis of an automobile. We told Dennis to get behind the car so nobody could see what he was doing, and to take off his clothes so he could play a rib on Bruiser. He had no idea what we planned to do, but whatever it was, he thought it would be a great idea. I’m sure the fact that he was drunk as a skunk had

something to do with his willingness to cooperate. Kenny and I just stood by the car while he undressed, while Bruiser and the rangers looked down at us every once in awhile. I’m sure he suspected we were up to no good, but he didn’t pay too much attention to us.

When Dennis was totally naked, we took out some yellow paint and brushes from our car. I told him, "Spread your legs." I laid down on the cart and rolled between his legs and began painting his privates and legs. Kenny painted his upper torso and face. All three of us were laughing like crazy. We told him to wait while we got Bruiser and sent him down.

Kenny and I went down to get Bruiser, but before we got there, somebody came outside and asked us a question. We went inside the party building and did whatever it was he had asked about. A short time later, Bruiser walked in and started to ask everyone, "Where’s Dennis? Has anybody seen Dennis?"

When Kenny and I heard Bruiser, we both looked at each other, realizing we had forgotten about him. Now, what we didn’t know, is that when you cover someone with paint, it blocks off the pores, and oxygen can’t get into the body. To make a long story short, the combination of alcohol and paint had caused Dennis to pass out and fall into a snowbank. When we reached the car where we had left him, we saw two feet sticking out from behind the car. He was so cold that his exposed skin had a bluish tint to it. Bruiser was mad when we told him what happened, but at the same time, he was laughing. "You dumb bastards. You could have killed the kid."

We carried Dennis back to the building and the rangers found a chemical that would remove the paint. Bruiser was trying to get him to drink coffee while we scrubbed. As that poor kid warmed up, his skin went from yellow and blue to a bright red. The chemical did almost as much damage as the paint and snow. The rangers stood him up in a warm shower and rinsed him off.

To his credit, Dennis Karbo was a real trooper. He thought it was funny and told the story to everyone he met over the next several months.

I have to say something about Dick the Bruiser. He was a really good guy. He always had beer in the dressing room for the boys, and since Snyder was too uppity to drink beer, Bruiser made sure he always had a couple of bottles of champagne in the cooler. Bruiser never acted like he was better than any of the boys who worked for him. In fact, he treated us as equals. He made sure we knew who ruled the roost, but he didn't lord his position over us.

People don't realize it, but Kenny and I tried to help homeless people when we could. As rough and tough as Kenny looked on the outside, he had a big heart. He was always looking for ways to help someone else. We'd go down on skid row and pass out cartons of cigarettes and bottles of Boone's Farm wine. In this age of political correctness, I know that doesn't seem like it was the proper thing to do, but they were going to beg or steal money to buy cigarettes and booze, anyway. We wanted to make it easier for them to get what they were going to get in the long run. We offered to buy them food, but they didn't want it, so we took them cigarettes, wine, and even gave them cash. Eventually, some bastard snitched on us and the cops told us not to do it anymore because they wanted them to leave town. That was sad because they weren't hurting anybody or causing any problems.

About eight months after we began wrestling in Indianapolis, our lawyer in Baton Rouge called and asked, "Can you come up with an extra five thousand dollars?"

I said, "I think so. What's it for?"

He wouldn't tell us, but he did say it would benefit us if we would just send him the money. We took him at his word and, over the next few weeks, sent him payments until we had paid the full amount. A few days after we made our last payment, he called to tell us the case had been dismissed. That was it. It was all over. Nothing else was said about it.

Chapter 19
The Dead Parrot

In July, Bruiser told us we would be spending some of our time working in the Minneapolis territory for Verne Gagne. Gagne and Snyder had something in common. Neither of them liked us. They both tried their best to get rid of us.

Two months later, on Monday, September 13, 1969, someone called Verne's office and told them we shouldn't go to Milwaukee that night because someone had said they were going to hurt us. They laughed about it and carried on, business as usual, and didn't bother calling to tell us about the threat.

We went to the town that night as expected. If they had told us, we wouldn't have gone, which is probably the reason why they didn't. They had spent money promoting our appearance there and didn't want anything to hurt the show that night. If we had known what lay ahead, we would have packed our bags and split.

We had a lot of heat in the territory, but we also had a lot of followers. A group of fans liked us and waited on us after the matches. When they invited us to go out with them, we would go. We were happy go lucky. That was the one thing Bruiser didn't like. He didn't want us to hang around with the wrestling fans. "You guys are supposed to be heels! You don't buddy up with the people who are supposed to hate you. They won't buy tickets to see you get your ass whipped." We didn't pay any attention. We did it, anyway.

After we wrestled Man Mountain Mike and Moose Cholak, a group of guys were waiting to take us to a party. We climbed into their car and left with them, stopping along the way to buy a case of beer. During the trip to their place, we were drinking, telling jokes, and having a good time. Nothing

seemed out of the ordinary and everybody acted like they were happy to have us with them.

We drove for quite some time before we pulled up in front of the Village Inn in Rochester [WI]. A few motorcycles and pickup trucks were parked outside. It looked like every bar I had seen a hundred times. When we walked in, we saw a group of bikers. That was my kind of crowd. I was in my element. At first, everything seemed to be cool. Everybody wanted to shake our hands and tell us how glad they were to have us there.

As we were walking towards the back, Kenny said, "I have to take a quick piss. I'll be right back out." When Kenny walked off, I heard someone say, "You guys ain't for real," which I assumed was aimed at our status as professional wrestlers. When I looked around, I noticed everyone was staring at me. It was then I came to the realization that we were in trouble. I don't know why, but it was just something I sensed. When I heard the bathroom door open, I turned around and saw Kenny walking out. I walked up to him and whispered, "Kenny, I think we're in trouble. When I say go, run to the front door."

Just as I turned back around, one of the guys hit me over the head with a chain. Luckily, it glanced off and came down across my shoulder. I rushed him, wrapped my fingers around his throat, and pinned him up against a wall. When the guy slipped out from underneath me, I turned around to where Kenny was … only to see several people pointing guns at me. They didn't seem like they were too sure of themselves, which was a relief because I had no defense whatsoever. They just stood in place. I noticed one guy standing up behind a piano with a shotgun pointed at me. He cocked it, pulled the trigger, and I heard a loud bang. I couldn't believe it when I saw the shotgun fall apart. The barrel came off and fell to the floor. I will never forget the look on the guy's face when the gun blew up on him. It was a look of complete, utter disbelief.

It began to dawn on me that we had been invited there so they could either beat the hell out of us or kill us. They could have done that easily because Kenny and I were heavily outnumbered. While everybody was frozen in shock from the sight of the gun blowing up, I grabbed Kenny's jacket and said, "Go!" I jerked him and began to run. The people in the bar were all

lined up and, as we ran past the pool tables, they hit us with pool cue sticks. One girl was picking up billiard balls from one of the tables and throwing them at us.

I don’t know if that was when Kenny got shot or not. The last time I saw Kenny, he was right behind me, swinging a Nazi helmet at the people closest to him. I don’t know where he got it because he didn’t bring it with him, but he was really letting them have it.

When I yanked on the handle of the front door, it didn’t open. I pulled a second time before I realized the door opened outwards. As I ran outside, I felt something hit me in the back. I’m pretty sure it was a cue stick, but I never knew for sure. I ran as if the demons of hell were after me … which, in a sense, they were.

I thought Kenny was behind me. When I had run about a hundred yards, I stopped and looked back towards the bar. There was nobody there. I thought, "Oh, god! He went the wrong way." I was thinking he had run towards the front door, but I can only assume he turned around and ran towards the back because he wasn’t in the front of the building.

I really had no other choice than to continue running, which is something I’ve felt guilty about all my life, but if Kenny was in trouble, I couldn’t have done a thing to help him by going back. I ran out onto a road and onto a bridge that crossed over the Fox River. The water wasn’t too deep — maybe between my navel and my chest — but it was flowing pretty fast because it had rained earlier that day. When I got down to the bank, I kicked off my boots and dove in and swam underwater towards the bridge. When I came up for air, I heard people talking above me, so I went back under water and came up on the other side. I was hoping they saw my boots and would think I had gone the other way. I heard someone yell, "There he is!" followed by two gunshots. I can’t say for sure they were shooting at me because it was pretty dark, but they were shining flashlights on the water.

I swam underwater for several minutes before I made my way back to the bank. I climbed out and began to run. I know for certain they were behind me at one point because the beams of their flashlights flicked past my head and across the trees on either side. I ran out of the trees into a small clearing

and saw a cornfield in front of me. I dove in without hesitation and continued to run. There’s no way they could have found me in there because I wandered around for a couple of hours before I could find my way out. I had no clue as to which direction I was walking. For all I knew, I could be heading back towards the bar … and that really worried me. Suddenly, I stepped out of the cornfield and into a large, open clearing. That worried me, too, because the moon was full and the sky was clear.

I continued to worry that I might be heading back towards the bar, but I broke into a run, wanting to put as much distance as possible between myself and the people looking for me. After a few minutes, I saw a farm house sitting back about 50 yards from a small country road. I ran up onto the porch and knocked on the screen door. It seemed like I waited forever, but the owner of the house eventually came out. When he opened the door and saw me — with blood on my face and wearing biker clothes — he slammed it closed. I continued to knock … not expecting them to open the door, but in the hopes that they’d call the police. I finally sat down on the porch steps and waited. Sure enough, the cops showed up. They got out and told me to get into their car. They didn’t ask any questions. They just pointed towards the car and told me to get in.

Once we were under way, the driver looked back at me and said, "You might as well tell us who did this."

I wasn’t quite sure what he was talking about because I didn’t know how he could have known about what went down at the bar. I asked, "Where’s Kenny, my partner?"

"Oh, he’s at the hospital. He was shot."

Like an idiot, I asked, "Is he alive?" They must have been thinking how stupid it was to ask such a question. Why would he be at the hospital if he was dead?

"He’s alive. We thought you might be hanging from a tree somewhere." I thought that was funny, but, at the same time, I had a sick feeling in my stomach. He said, "Do you want to tell us who they are and make a statement?"

"No. I don’t know who they are. I’m tellin’ ya. I don’t know."

They took me to a hospital and a doctor came in to see me. He took one look at me and, from the look on his face, thought I looked disgusting. He parted my hair and sewed up my head. When I asked them what they were going to do with me, they said, "Nothing. You can go."

"Well, I ain’t got no way to go anywhere."

They said, "We’ll take you to the police station and you can sit there until someone comes to get you."

That’s exactly what they did. When we arrived at the station, I called a friend in Indianapolis and he came out to pick me up. While I waited, the cops acted cold and indifferent towards me. They didn’t offer to help me or anything. Every time I asked someone about Kenny, they said they didn’t know anything about him. I couldn’t find anyone who could, or would, tell me anything. I finally called Bruiser late that morning to see if he knew anyone who could make some calls and get some information for me. Within an hour, Dick called from his office (which was in his home) and told me Kenny was in the hospital. I wanted to leave the territory right then because I didn’t want to cause him any more trouble, but he insisted I stay.

That incident was a wakeup call for me. I decided to clean up my act and settle down a bit. From what I understand, Kenny spent several weeks in St. Luke’s Hospital in Burlington. I wanted to go see him, but Bruiser refused to book me in Milwaukee or the surrounding area. I called the hospital and told them I wanted to stop by and visit Kenny, but they told me I wouldn’t be allowed to see him. For some reason, his mother and father blamed me for everything and they were pretty angry. They actually told people I wanted a new partner, so I paid the bikers to hurt Kenny to get him out of the way. That really hurt. Kenny and I were as close as brothers. He was my best friend. I would never do anything to hurt him.

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Racine WI Journal Times, Monday, September 15, 1969

INDIANA WRESTLER SHOT, BEATEN OUTSIDE RACINE COUNTY TAVERN

Racine County sheriff’s deputies are waiting to question a Plainfield, Ind., professional wrestler who was hospitalized Sunday after being shot and beaten near a Rochester tavern.

Lawrence K. McMullen, 25, underwent surgery at St. Luke’s Hospital and was listed in fairly good condition today.

Deputies attempted to piece together fragments of the story from witnesses and McMullen’s wrestling partner, Donald V. Kalt, 39, also of Plainfield.

About 12:30 a.m. Sunday, deputies were sent to the Village Inn at Rochester to investigate a report of a fight but found nothing amiss.

A half-hour later a Burlington patrolman hear someone calling for help and found McMullen lying wounded behind the Railway Express Office, 516 Mill St.

SAW WHITE CAR

A Burlington youth said he saw a white Dodge auto, about 1963-model, pull behind the building and drive back out a short time before McMullen was found.

Shortly before 4:30 a.m. deputies found Kalt when they were sent to a home on Riverside Drive in Waterford to investigate reports of a man pounding on the door.

Kalt was taken to Burlington Memorial Hospital where he was treated for cuts to the head and welts and bruises to the upper portion of his body.

Kalt told deputies he and McMullen left Milwaukee after participating in a wrestling match and stopped at the Village Inn on their way back to Indiana.

A fight broke out and Kalt said he ran and jumped into the Fox River to elude a group of men who were chasing him. He said he heard shots as he ran toward the river.

HEARD SHOTS

A witness said he watched through a window as a group of men beat one man on the street. He momentarily turned away from the window and heard "what sounded like two or three shots."

When he went back to the window, he saw a man lying on the ground.

The guys doing the beating said the man was not dead and that they were going to take him to a hospital. They put him in a car and drove off."

Outside the tavern, deputies found blood stains on the sidewalk along with a

bicycle chain, part of a rifle, two broken billiard cues, two spent .32 caliber cartridges and one unused cartridge.
A bartender at the Village Inn, Robert G. Walker, 44, of Rochester, allegedly told deputies that nothing out of the ordinary occurred. He was quoted as saying, "It was just the regular Saturday crowd."
McMullen was taken to Burlington Memorial Hospital and later tranferred to St. Luke's.
PAIRED IN WRESTLING
Deputies said he suffered gunshot wounds to both thighs, cuts to his face and head and welts and bruises over his entire body.
McMullen and Kalt were paired in a tag team wrestling match under the name "CHAIN GANG." Deputies said they were dressed to resemble motorcycle gang members.
Authorities theorized that the men may have become involved in a quarrel in the tavern with members of the "Outlaws," a Milwaukee motorcycle gang.
A Waterford man told deputies the "Outlaws" were angry about their club name being used by the two men and may have "set up" the wrestlers for the beating.

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United Press International, Monday, September 15, 1969

WRESTLERS WIN AND THEN LOSE
RACINE, Wis. -- Two wrestlers from Plainfield, Ind., won a tag team match in Milwaukee Saturday night, but lost a tavern brawl near here at Rochester a few hours later.
Unknown assailants severely beat both men, leaving one with bullet wounds.
Sheriff's deputies were investigating the assault on Lawrence K. McMullen, 25, and Donald V. Kalt, 39, at the Village Inn shortly after midnight.
McMullen was wounded by gunfire in both thighs and suffered head and face cuts and bruises on much of his body. He remains hospitalized here Sunday night listed in satisfactory condition. However, one report said he was in danger of losing one leg, because a bullet that pierced an artery stopped the flow of blood to the limb.

Kalt was treated for head cuts and bruises at a Burlington, Wis., hospital and then released.
Kalt told deputies the fight began when he and McMullen arrived at the tavern on their way back to Indiana.

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Almost 35 years later, I went to the Cauliflower Alley Club reunion in Las Vegas. It was an event where the wrestlers could mingle with the fans and we could sell our pictures and other gimmicks. Ox Baker and I set up together at one table. I was selling several different photos of myself at different stages of my career — when I was still Don Kalt, as the Daltons with my partner Jim, as the Fabulous Fargos with Jackie, and as the Chain Gang with Kenny Mack.

While I was sitting at the table, someone walked up and introduced himself. He said he was one of Kenny's relatives and shook my hand. I said, "Oh, god! I've been looking for him for a long, long time. I hope he's doing okay."

He said, "He died."

I couldn't believe it. "When did he pass away?"

"July twenty-eighth, two thousand six. He was only sixty one."

That blew my mind. I told him I was sorry and all the things you're expected to say when you get news like that. To be honest, I rambled because I really didn't know what to say. I don't remember what I said, but at one point, he interrupted me. "Kenny always wanted to call you."

I perked up when I heard that. I had no idea. "I told Kenny so many times to call you. Every time I did, he said, 'No, he won't talk to me.'"

I was flabbergasted. I would have given anything to have been able to talk to Kenny again. All that time had passed with both of us thinking the other didn't want to talk. Every day, I think, "If I could have had just that one phone call …" That's one of the big regrets in my life. Just knowing he

wanted to call makes me feel good, and the fact that his relatives didn’t hold anything against me makes me feel even better. But it’s something I’ll never be able to forget and a weight that drags on me every time I think about it.

He told me he and his brother were selling pictures at another table, so I took some of my pictures over and gave them to them. All I could say was, "You know, I’m so sorry that things went down like they did, and I honestly wish I could talk to Kenny just one more time."

That was the last time I saw them.

Four nights after the incident, Bruiser put me back to work. He had Chris Markoff take Kenny’s place as my tag team partner in Duluth [MN] and we wrestled Red Bastien and Billy Red Lyons. I had trouble getting my mind into the match that night. I was okay until the ring announcer introduced Markoff and me as "The Chain Gang." That just wasn’t right. Kenny and I were the Chain Gang. That was a good example of how promoters moved right along with the program and how quickly any of us could be replaced.

Three nights later, I was teamed with Chris Colt [Charles Harris], who Bruiser billed as "Jim" Dillinger.

Chris and I hit it off from the start. The first time I met Chris was when Jim Dalton and I were wrestling in Eugene, Oregon. Chris wasn’t yet in the business, but he wanted to get in. When we got there that night, he carried my bag in. A lot of the kids did that back then. They’d come up and ask if they could carry our bags in so they could get into the matches for free.

Chris finally got into the business by writing a letter to Terry Garvin, who was wrestling in Louisiana. One of the wrestlers gave him Terry’s address and told him he’d tell Terry to be on the lookout for his letter. I don’t think I need to spell out the details, but Terry liked the young boys. I was in Louisiana when Terry got the letter and pictures of Chris. He brought the letter to the TV station one morning and read it to me. He was really excited about it. I’ll never forget what he said. "Boy, this is gonna be great! I don’t have to go to the bus station for supper anymore."

Sick.

A short time later, Chris was traveling with Terry and he became a great performer.

One of the interesting things about Chris is that he knew the great rock-and-blues performer, Joe Cocker, personally. One day, he asked me, "Do you wanna meet him?"

"Hell, yeah."

One night, when Joe Cocker was performing, Chris took me into the auditorium and backstage. As we walked down the aisle, a guy walked out from behind the curtain. He looked like a homeless bum. He wore tennis shoes that looked like they were too big, baggy pants, a wrinkled shirt, and his hair was a mess. As he adjusted the microphone, I asked Chris, "When do you think Cocker will be here?"

Chris said, "That’s him fixing the microphone."

I said, "What?"

That’s the way Joe Cocker dressed and looked back in those days. Chris introduced us and he invited us to come to his pad after the concert where he was hosting a big party.

I felt badly about moving on with a new partner, but I didn’t have any choice. The "Dillingers" had been drawing money for Bruiser and he wanted it to continue. I couldn’t convince him to change his mind, so I took it upon myself to change our image. I got rid of the motorcycle gimmicks and came up with a new idea. I shaved and trimmed my hair, and then went out and bought camouflage shirts, levis, and head bands. My plan was for our characters to be more like hippies. Originally, I wanted us to dress as convicts with a ball-and-chain around our ankles, but that didn’t get over too well with Wilbur Snyder.

Changing my gimmick wasn’t a spur of the moment decision. I felt like the "Chain Gang" gimmick had run its course. Like always, when the excitement of a gimmick began to die down, I was ready to move on to

something else. Kenny and I had actually talked about doing something new and even moving on to another territory.

When Chris stopped by that afternoon to pick me up, he had a beard, moustache, and wore dirty clothes … like I had with Kenny. He couldn’t believe the change in me when he walked into the house. "What the hell’s this?"

I said, "I’m not gonna do the biker gimmick no more. My partner got hurt and we almost got killed. I’m just not gonna do it."

We wrestled later that night in Indianapolis [September 20]. I surprised everyone with my new look when I walked into the dressing room. Bruiser took one look at me and yelled, "What the hell did you do?"

I said, "I’m not that guy any more. I’ll keep the Dillinger name, but I’m going to be more like ‘Don Fargo’ from now on."

That night, Bruiser began calling us the "New Chain Gang." For that one night only, Chris wrestled in the biker clothes and I wore my new stuff.

As the "New Chain Gang," Chris and I weren’t as bad as people made us out to be, but we lived the part, just like we had when Kenny and I were the Chain Gang. When I got home at night from a town, my wife would make me take off all my clothes before I came into the house. She’d put them in a garbage bag and leave them outside. The next time I left for a show, I put it all back on … unwashed. Chris and I went for weeks without washing our clothes. We wanted to look as grungy as possible. We even wore old boots, with duct tape wrapped around them to hold the soles onto the tops. As I always had, I lived my gimmick.

After taking off my clothes, my wife would make me take a shower. She wouldn’t let me sit on our furniture until I did. Once I had my shower, she’d let me join the family. She put up with a lot from me.

One night, she said, "Your boys wanna talk to you."

"Where are they?"

"They’re sittin’ on the couch in the living room."

When I walked into the living room, I asked them, "What is it you guys want?"

"Well, Dad. We’ve been talking … don’t get mad now. I’m gonna tell you something … but you have to promise not to get mad."

"I’m not gonna get mad."

"Well, we don’t wanna be wrestlers."

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. "What?"

"We don’t wanna be wrestlers."

"What do you wanna be, for God’s sake?"

"I’m not sure yet, but I don’t wanna be a wrestler."

I said, "Why don’t you wanna be a wrestler? Look at me!"

"That’s why we don’t wanna be wrestlers."

When my oldest boy was graduating from Plainfield [IN] High School, they held a special ceremony where they were going to have pictures taken of the fathers with their sons in their graduation robes. I was supposed to be there, but I was off that night and went out drinking. When I remembered I was supposed to be there, I blurted out, "Oh, my god! I gotta go to my son’s graduation."

I hopped onto my Harley, my righteous bike, and put it into the wind. A righteous bike is the opposite of a "garbage can" bike. It had no shocks, a small front end, high-rise handlebars (which we called buckhorns), a big back seat, a high safety bar, teardrop gas tanks, and no lights other than the headlights. To start the bike, you had to kick it or, as I had to so often, push it.

I had long, stringy hair, a beard, and I hadn’t taken a bath in days. I was dirty. When I pulled up to the field where they were all gathered, all the wives and children were sitting in the bleachers. The graduates were all standing out in the field with their fathers. I pushed down the kickstand, jumped off the bike, and ran over to stand beside my son. The fathers were all looking at me, like, "Who in the hell is this character?"

I could see my wife shaking her head. My son looked up at me and said, "That’s my dad." He never forgot that and talks about it all the time.

Chris Colt and I worked together for a long time. Not just in Indianapolis, but in other territories, as well. We just seemed to jell.

This may be hard to believe, but I was partners in Indianapolis with Chris for nine months and I never knew he was gay. I never suspected it. I’d stop at bars when we were on the road. I always liked the rough places. The chicks in those places were red hot. He’d walk in and drink with me. If I saw a good-looking girl when we were standing at the bar, I’d say, "Hey, man. Check that out."

He’d look her over and say, "Yeah, man. She’s pretty hot."

I never actually saw him with a woman, but he talked about women like one of the boys. It wasn’t until years later, when a promoter brought me into Arizona to wrestle, that I ran into Chris again. I didn’t know it when I got there, but Chris was living in the apartment complex where I was going to stay. In fact, I didn’t even know he was wrestling there. The first day I was there, I went down to the pool and he saw me from his apartment window. He came down and walked up behind me. "Hey, Don! I heard you were comin’ in."

I was really surprised to see him. "Chris! I didn’t know you were here."

"Yeah. Hey, man. You wanna go up and have a beer?"

I never turned down a beer, so I followed him up to his apartment. When we walked in, I saw a young boy sitting on the sofa. He was a good-looking

guy. Chris gestured towards him and said, "Oh, yeah. By the way, this is Ernie, my boyfriend."

I didn’t think anything about Chris using the word "boyfriend." In fact, I assumed he meant the guy was a boy and a friend. One night, I heard all hell break loose in his apartment. Those two were arguing and screaming at each other like an old married couple. I still didn’t pick up on the relationship between the two of them, but they argued worse than two women. Oh, my god. They seemed to be so happy, but that went on night after night. After a week or so, the truth about the situation suddenly dawned on me. The guy was Chris’ boyfriend!

They kept a beautiful parrot in a cage. Shortly after I arrived in the territory, the bird began to lose its feathers. Every time I went to the apartment to help them get their shit settled, I noticed more and more feathers on the bottom of the cage. One day, the bird just dropped dead. It blew my mind. When I asked somebody about it, they told me birds get nervous when people holler and scream, and if it continues over a long period of time, they’ll literally die of fright.

The fact that Chris was gay didn’t bother me. I had known him ever since he was a young boy. A week or so after the blinders came off my eyes, I asked him, Chris. I want to ask you a question, and I want you to tell me the truth."

"What’s that?"

"When you used to carry my bag when you were little, did you do it to get into the matches for free, or to fucking make out with me."

He grinned and said, "You old bastard. I wouldn’t touch you in a million years."

I laughed and said, "Okay. I’m glad we got that straightened out."

Chris and I did a lot of drugs when we were together. We’d smoke joints, pop No-Doz pills (we called them stay-awake pills) to stay awake, and drink NyQuil to help us sleep. That’s what they called yo-yoing. Snyder

used to ask us all the time, "You boys haven’t been drinking tonight, have you?"

"No, sir."

That was the truth. Of course, he didn’t ask about the grass, or the uppers and downers, and we weren’t about to offer the information.

I liked making the money that came with wrestling on the main event, but there were a lot of times I hoped they would put us lower down on the card because I wanted to leave early. I loved wrestling, but all I could think about was getting finished so I could get back to the dressing room and have a beer. In some territories, we went back to the dressing room between falls. I’d run to the back, grab a beer, swig it down, and run back out to the ring.

The thing I remember the most about my time with Chris had nothing to do with Chris himself. One night, Chris and I went to a town and, as we were walking to the ring to wrestle in a battle royal, I saw Kenny Mack sitting in the audience. He was in a wheelchair. I couldn’t stop to talk to him because I had to get into the ring, and when the matches were over, by the time I changed clothes, he was gone.

That was the last time I saw him.

I really think his wife poisoned his mind against me. She never liked me because Kenny and I were together more than he was with her, which was the way it was for a lot of the tag teams in those days. I can understand that because Kenny and I were on the road together every night, wrestling and partying, while she was left at home with the kids.

Chapter 20
The Hammer

Chris Colt and I wrestled together as a tag team for nine months. On June 26, 1970, we dropped the WWA tag team title to Bill Miller and Dick the Bruiser in Indianapolis, and left the territory. A little more than a month later, Chris called to see if I'd be interested in coming to Phoenix. I really didn't have any place to go, so he arranged it with Ernie Mohammed, the promoter. They gave me a $300-a-week guarantee for one of the easiest schedules I ever had. We worked two house shows a week — Phoenix and Tucson — and television.

The building in which we wrestled in Phoenix — which, strangely enough, was called Madison Square Garden — was very small, but nice. In Tucson, we wrestled in the Tucson Garden. Both buildings held about 2,000 people. We were involved in a program [series of matches] with Tito Montez and Arman Hussian [Michael Barber]. The only other wrestler I knew was Don Arnold [Joseph Elliott], who I met when I first broke into the wrestling business in 1952. Most of the other wrestlers were local guys I had never heard of: Kiko Torres, Chuck Hondo, Golden Boy, Roy Price, Jody Arnold, Nano Ortega, and a masked man known as The Medic. It seemed to be what we used to call an outlaw territory.

There were a lot of Mexican fans there and they really got into the matches. In fact, they got into the matches so much that they wanted to hurt us. They'd throw chairs and anything that wasn't nailed down. To protect us, Mohammed erected a fence down both sides of the aisle that led to the ring. That was nice because we could raise hell while we walked to the ring, without fear of getting stabbed or hit by a thrown object. The fans couldn't touch us. It was a smart move on the part of the promoter. I later was told the promoter did that, not because he was concerned about our safety, but to protect himself.

Mohammed really was a strange character. He seemed to be more of a mark than he was a promoter. He saw himself as a wannabe promoter, sans wrestler. He booked himself on the cards as The Executioner, a masked man.

On television, we would do our interviews for the upcoming house shows at ringside after we wrestled. After Mohammed wrestled (under the mask), he would get out of the ring, sit down with the commentator at ringside, pull up his mask so his face was revealed, and begin talking about himself. He would talk about what a great match he just had. He then said, "One day, we're gonna find out who that masked man is. He really was something, wasn't he?" I couldn't believe it! I just could not believe it! He was sitting there with the mask on top of his head and talking about himself in the third person. At first, I thought it was a comedy segment, but he was dead serious.

One time, after wrestling, he went to the dressing room and changed clothes. He came back out … with the mask hanging out of his back pocket. On still another occasion, some of the guys put his mask on top of the cowboy hat he was wearing, without him knowing, and he walked through the audience.

Mohammed must have had something going for him because he was a successful businessman in Phoenix. He and his wife ran a steakhouse for years near Lookout Mountain in South Phoenix, and if you look at the sidewalks near Arizona State University in Tempe, you will see the logo for the Ernie Mohammed Paving Company, which he also owned.

I wrestled in Phoenix again in 1975, but Mohammed was gone and Larry Hennig was promoting the town. He brought me in for a couple of matches when I was passing through. I wrestled Ricky Romero one week and Tony Hernandez the next.

In late August 1970, I got a call from the Sheik [Ed Farhat], who invited me to work for him in the Detroit territory. I had been in Phoenix for less than ten days, but I wanted to wrestle more than just twice a week.

At the show in Detroit on Saturday, August 22, Sheik asked me if I would do him a favor by picking up one of the young wrestlers on Tuesday and take him with me to Dayton. I was more than happy to do that because I was looking forward to having some company on the trip. His name was Greg Valentine, but at the time, he was wrestling as "Baby Face Nelson."

Greg, the son of the legendary Johnny Valentine, began his career by wrestling as Johnny Valentine, Jr. He was a young kid who was just getting his feet wet in the business. He got started during a three-month run in Calgary and got booked in Cleveland in July 1970.

I owned a big conversion van at the time. It was decked out to the max. I had a table, chairs, and a couch in the back, and the walls and floor were covered with carpet. That was when I was a cat lover. I always took four or five Siamese cats with me when I made a trip.

When I pulled into Greg's driveway, I honked the horn and he came out. He barely had time to sit down before those cats were all over him. "God! God dang! Do you like cats or somethin'?"

I said, "Yeah." I had never seen him before, but when I looked at his face, I could have sworn I saw Johnny Valentine looking back at me. Greg looked so much like him. I even told him so. "Jeez. You look just like your dad."

When we were on our way, he kept looking over at me. I finally asked, "What?"

"How did you get those big arms?"

He couldn't get over the size of my arms. I was really working out heavy and I had big arms. That broke the ice and we talked all the way to Dayton. I knew from the moment I met him that he had a lot of potential, so I decided to take him under my wing.

When I went to Detroit, I really didn't have a gimmick, so I went in as Don Fargo. When I met Greg, though, I remembered back to how well things had gone when Bobby Davis had been my valet. I thought Greg would be perfect for that role, so I decided to do something along the lines of what

the original Gorgeous George did. I had my hair done in a perm and bought two nice robes.

The following week in Dayton, Sheik had the two of us booked together on television and I was ready to make my debut as the new character. Greg was really nervous. I had told him, "There's nothing to be nervous about. All you have to do is spray me with perfume after I take off my robe."

Earlier that morning, I had sent Greg out to buy a hand-operated device called a Flit gun, which was commonly used at the time to spray insecticide. When we got to the TV station, he pulled a huge sprayer out of his bag. It had a really wide nozzle on the end. "Good god," I said. "That's huge. We need something smaller." Greg convinced me he could make it work by putting very little pressure on the pump handle. "Okay," I said. It suddenly dawned on me that we had a sprayer, but nothing to spray. "I forgot to tell you to buy something to spray. Go to the store and get some perfume or something."

When he came back, I asked him, "Did you get it?"

"Yeah. I already filled the spray can."

That's all I needed to know. A few minutes later, we were on our way to the ring. I stood in one corner of the ring and mugged to the crowd, holding up a mirror and looking into it while I sang, "Oh, you must have been a beautiful baby." The crowd began to yell, "You ugly bastard. You ain't beautiful!" I acted like their comments bothered me and then slowly began to take off my robe.

The plan was for me to strip down to my wrestling trunks and boots. When I finished, I would hold my hands up into the air so Greg could spray me lightly with the perfume. When Greg pushed the handle into the sprayer … PFOOM! A huge cloud of white powder surged out, covering me and everybody behind me at ringside. Did he stop with one pump? No! He pumped that damn sprayer three or four more times. I was yelling, "Hey, stop! Stop it!" He acted like he couldn't hear me. The people in the audience were laughing so hard. I looked down and saw people slapping their legs in an attempt to brush off the powder, only to send huge clouds of

powder into the air, which floated to all four corners of the studio. Even Greg was covered with powder. His black tuxedo looked white. The funniest thing about it was, Greg never cracked a smile. He had his nose in the air and a serious look on his face, like he was a man-servant performing a solemn ritual for his master.

I didn’t know what to do. I couldn’t get Greg to stop for anything. I kept gesturing towards my opponent, trying to get him to come over and do something. When he finally understood what I wanted him to do, he ran over, knocked Greg down, and threw me across the ring. The timekeeper rang the bell and the match began.

When we got back to the dressing room after the match, I pulled Greg aside and said, "Why the hell did you put baby powder in the sprayer? I told you to get perfume!"

"It wasn’t baby powder."

"Then what was it?"

He grinned and motioned toward the bench where our gear was sitting. Beside my suitcase was an open box. Of course, I couldn’t read the label, so I asked him what it was.

"Douche powder."

That idiot sprayed me and everybody in the studio, with douche powder!

That was the first — and only — time I did that gimmick. I never did it again.

Greg and I were together, off and on, for almost three years. That’s a long time in the wrestling business when you’re together every day, but I really liked him and we got along well. I was a lot older than Greg, though, so I feel like I raised him. In fact, I was almost the same age as his dad, Johnny Valentine.

Johnny Valentine was one of the greatest performers ever in the wrestling business. He knew how to manipulate the people into reacting the way he wanted. Greg was a fantastic performer, too, and, like his dad, he had a funny, but dry, sense of humor. He wasn't a talker, either. There were times when we went on trips that I couldn't get two words out of him. He worked like Johnny, too, in the respect that he could take good bumps. The most common thing the two of them had was … they both worked stiff as hell. That's why the wrestlers later gave Greg the nickname "The Hammer."

In the ring, Greg was so much like his dad. … slow and methodical. When he clubbed his opponents with his big fists [i.e. the hammer], I often thought he was moving in slow motion. He put everything he had into it, though, so the move looked devastating. His dad did the same thing. Johnny [Valentine] would hold his opponent and slowly turn to look out at the people. When he had everyone's attention, he'd raise his arm in the air, wait until the people began to yell, and bring his fist down on his opponent's back.

I didn't think "Don Fargo and Baby Face Nelson" would get over, so, on November 14, 1970, Greg and I wrestled for the first time as … Don and Johnny Fargo. We wrestled Guy "Stomper" Mitchell and Ben Justice [aka Jerry Maiburg, real name Gerald May] in Dayton. With the blond hair, Greg and I could easily pass as brothers. I wanted to continue the legacy of "The Fabulous Fargo Brothers." Of course, I got Jackie's permission, which I always did before I tried something like that. Greg made a great Fargo and we had a great run.

When Greg and I wrestled as a team, I always called him "Johnny." In later years, I called him "Hammer," like everyone else. For the purposes of this book, however, to avoid confusion, I'll simply refer to him as "Greg."

One of the people I met in Toledo that I really liked was Killer Tim Brooks. I liked Tim because we were two peas in a pod. He was just as wild and crazy as I was. Every time Tim and I got together, we did something stupid.

One night, two girls invited us to their house, so we went with them. The four of us got drunk out of our minds. Of course, the more we drank, the wilder and crazier Tim and I would get. An hour or so into our party, a guy

showed up. Apparently, he let the two girls live with him in exchange for … well, let’s just say "favors." We didn’t like him, and, apparently, the two girls didn’t, either. They told us they were going to move out because they were tired of putting up with his crap.

The four of us went upstairs to his bedroom and proceeded to throw everything he owned out the window — clothes, bed sheets, towels. We took everything out of his dresser drawers and threw it out the window, and the dresser drawers followed. We thought that was so funny that we began to throw out every piece of furniture that would fit through the window. The guy had a chair in the room that wouldn’t fit, so we broke it into pieces and threw it out a piece at a time. When there was nothing left to throw out, we left. It’s a wonder the guy didn’t call the cops, but he didn’t. We never heard a word about it after that.

While I was there, Tim decided he wanted a new gimmick, so he got a mask, a whip, and a cowboy hat and called himself "The Bounty Hunter." The first night he came out wearing the outfit was at the ice skating rink in Toledo on September 24, 1970. Hammer and I were in the balcony, overlooking the area where the wrestlers appeared on their way to the ring. When he walked out, Hammer and I yelled in unison, "Hey, Tim Brooks!" He turned around and stared at us. The fans all began to yell, "That’s Tim Brooks!" We killed that gimmick deader than Kelsey’s nuts. We knew it was wrong, but we just couldn’t help ourselves from doing stuff like that.

I met Dewey Robertson for the first time when I wrestled in Toronto. Dewey would later have a great run as "The Missing Link" in the WWF, as well as the Oklahoma and Texas territories. He had one of the most muscular bodies of anyone I knew in the business. He looked like he had been chiseled out of stone.

We made a trip together one time and stopped to do some hunting. He had a bolt action, high-powered, 30-aught-six sniper rifle that I fell in love with. When he noticed my interest in the firearm, he asked, "Do you wanna shoot it?"

"Hell, yeah."

I tested the weight of the gun, put the butt against my shoulder, and looked through the telescopic sight. At least, I tried to look through the scope. The truth is, I couldn’t see a thing through it. "Pull it in closer," Dewey told me.

I did, but I still couldn’t see anything. "I still can’t see."

"Put your eye against it."

When I did, the woods in the distance suddenly came into focus. "Squeeze the trigger," he said.

I did. In fact, I pulled both triggers simultaneously. That son-of-a-bitch recoiled and split my eye wide open. Blood poured down my face and onto the front of my shirt. I couldn’t believe I fell for it. What a dumb ass I was! When Dewey quit laughing, he said, "Well, at least you don’t have to get the hardway tonight, do you, Fargo?"

When we got back into the car, I looked in the rear view mirror. "Yeah! I think that’ll look good for TV." I forgot all about the rifle recoiling. "Yeah! That’s gonna look great!"

Greg and I worked in the Detroit territory for almost five months before we ventured to Cleveland to work for Pedro Martinez, and then to Indianapolis for Bruiser. Two months later, in June 1971, we went to Calgary to wrestle for Stu Hart. We only stayed for a month before we left.

Stu Hart didn’t cheat us, but it took forever to get our money. He had an interesting way of making payoffs. We would go to his house and he’d call us, one at a time, into the hallway. "Ecch, uhh … I got your … ecch … pay right here. Kid … ecch … you did pretty good. Ecch. Here’s some money right here. Keep up … ecch … the good work."

Stu took a page out of Bert Ruby’s rulebook. He would pay everybody in a way that made us feel like we might be getting more than anyone else. "I’m gonna give you … ecch … a little extra … ecch … but don’t say anything to anybody." As a rule, nobody was supposed to tell anybody else what they made. That kept everybody guessing, which caused a lot of friction between the boys. Everybody was looking out of the corner of their eyes. "Is he

making more than me?" That was a smart move on Stu's part because it kept everybody on their toes. We always thought we had to perform harder than the week before if he wanted to continue to get that bonus. Not knowing what anybody else was paid, we'd all go out and bust our butts. The guys wanted my payoff, even though they didn't know what I got. The thing they didn't realize was, I wanted their payoff. I didn't know what they made, either, but I just knew it had to be more than what I was being paid.

We had to be very careful with Stu. So many times, he'd come up to me and say, "Kid. You've got one hell of a body. And those arms! I'll bet you can really wrestle. Do you wanna go downstairs and work out a little bit?"

"Nah, ah." I wasn't going downstairs with him for any amount of money. They didn't call his basement "The Dungeon" for nothing. I felt bad for the new guys who didn't know his reputation. He'd get them in the ring in his basement and put them in holds that made them scream at the top of their lungs. I knew better because he punished me when I first got into the business. He had the ability to hurt you and he loved every minute he spent doing it.

When we left Calgary, I went back to my old stomping grounds — Mobile — while Greg went back to Cleveland to wrestle in single matches. I don't know where Greg wrestled that fall, other than a couple of shots in St. Louis, but he began wrestling for Joe Dusek in Omaha in October.

Mobile was doing good business during that time. Most of my matches were against Ken Lucas, Prince Pullins [Calvin Pullins], Mike Boyette [Mike Bowyer], a youngster named Johnny West (who later would go on to have a great career under the name Kevin Sullivan), and Cowboy Bob Kelly, from whom I won the Gulf Coast title three weeks into my run.

When we got there, Jim Baugus was still working as Jim Dalton, and he was teaming with Randy Colley, who was wrestling as Jack Dalton. I should have called the police and reported Randy for stealing my identity. Fortunately, the original Jack Dalton (me) didn't have any money in the bank, so there wasn't much he could do with it. All kidding aside, Randy was a great replacement for me and the two of them did well for themselves.

On October 6, I lost the Gulf Coast title to Ken Lucas in Mobile. After the match, I "assaulted" the two referees, Lynn Strasser and Rick Gibson, and was "suspended indefinitely" by Bob Kelly, the matchmaker, for my actions. The story they had been pushing was that Dory Funk Jr. was coming into the territory to defend the NWA world heavyweight title against the best wrestler there. Being "suspended" knocked me out of the running. It didn't, however, prevent a mysterious masked man, who showed up at the October 16 TV taping, from challenging for the top spot. The masked man called himself "Mr. D." He wore long black tights and a black mask with a skull-and-crossbones insignia cross-stitched on the side. When he walked onto the set in the TV studio, he produced a "letter from the National Wrestling Alliance" that gave him the right to enter the October 20 tournament that would determine who would challenge Funk the following week.

Of course, anyone who followed wrestling in Mobile knew who Mr. D was immediately.

It was me!

I'll bet none of you saw that coming.

The fans, of course, all knew who I was. There was no hiding my tattoos or my build. In fact, we didn't even attempt to hide my identity. I even wore the same kind of outfit I wore as Don Fargo, except it was a different color.

I couldn't stand wearing the full-face masks that covered my entire head. I don't know how the boys worked in them. They're hot, they restrict your vision, you lose all facial expressions, and they put pressure on your head, so it's hard to breathe. I tried it one time and said, "Nope, I ain't goin' for this." As a kid, I was a comic book freak. I couldn't read them, but I loved the artwork and the action. When I got older, I looked through them for ideas. I remembered how good Captain America looked with the mask that left his mouth and chin exposed. I have that German jaw, so that type of a mask not only looked good on me, but it was different from what the fans were used to seeing. That's the type of mask I wore in the ring. I even shaved my moustache so I would look clean cut.

The tournament consisted of four opening-round matches, two second-round matches, and the finale. I beat Prince Pullins in the first round, Karl Von Stroheim [Walter Nurnberg] in the second round, and the Wrestling Pro [Tarzan Baxter] in the final match. At my side that night was another mysterious masked man — The Black Baron.

Actually, the Baron was Johnny Fargo, a.k.a. Greg Valentine. In the dressing room before the match, I handed Greg a black mask that matched the one I wore and told him to put it on. "You're going to be the Black Baron for the next few weeks."

Greg wasn't happy. No. That's too mild. He hated the idea. He had never worn a mask and he didn't want to put it on. I can't say I blame him because a lot of people have trouble wrestling while wearing a mask. He struggled to get it on and swore at me the whole time. When he finally got it on, he looked like he was going to panic. "I can't breathe."

"What do you mean you can't breathe? Your nose and mouth are hanging open."

It took a few minutes, but he finally settled down. I have to say, he really looked good in that mask. It's a shame he didn't wear one more often because he looked like he was born to wear one. The mask did a good job of hiding his identity, but it was the first time he had been there, so nobody would have known who he was if he had gone out barefaced. The only drawback was that all but the most dimwitted of the people knew who I was, so they spent the entire night looking at him, trying to figure out who he was, rather than watching me in the ring.

The following week, on October 26, I wrestled Dory for the strap. Before the match, Lee Fields came into the dressing room and said, "Fargo, you've gotta lose tonight."

I said, "I don't have any problem with that." And I didn't. I never did … when it made sense. I gave the promoters a lot of headaches, but the one thing I never did was argue with a promoter or booker when they told me what they wanted me to do. I knew I could always do something to redeem my standing with the people. When Dory came into the dressing room and

was told the plan, he told Lee he wouldn’t do it. "No. Fargo’s one of your top boys. That’s the wrong thing to do." He looked over at me and asked, "Can you go an hour, Fargo?"

I said, "Yeah."

"Well, that’s what we’ll do," said Dory.

We had one hell of a match. We wrestled to a 60-minute stalemate. I felt good. We won a fall apiece and the time limit expired during the third fall. You don’t see matches like that today. Back then, if someone asked us to wrestle for an hour, we would do it without giving it any thought.

One hour in the ring, though, is one hell of a long time. In those days, the timekeeper would announce the time elapsed over the loudspeaker. After wrestling for a few minutes, you’d begin to think, "Damn, I wish he’d say fifteen minutes is gone."

Finally, you would hear it. "Fifteen minutes gone."

After hearing that, you couldn’t wait to hear 30 minutes, and then 45 minutes. Time seemed to slow to a crawl when you had to wrestle for 60 minutes.

As I stated earlier, I worked with Dory in his first match, and he became the world heavyweight champion. I look back at things like that and think about what an honor it was to have been part of something like Dory Junior’s first match, and later, wrestling him for the world title when the world title really meant something.

Greg and I continued to wrestle as Mr. D and the Black Baron until Bob Kelly took off my mask during our match on November 17. The following week, he unmasked Greg after beating him two falls straight. For some strange reason, Lee Fields billed him in the Mobile [AL] Register newspaper ads as Johnny" Valentine, which caused confusion in the weeks that followed. The fans, however — many of whom kept up with national wrestling news through the wrestling magazines — were smarter than that.

They called him Johnny Fargo until he left during the first week of January the following year.

However, before Greg left, we wrestled the Wrestling Pro on December 1 in Mobile. The stipulation of the match was that the Pro would put the title on the line against both of us, but he would wrestle only one of us at a time. Greg and I ganged up on him before the match began, which resulted in Greg being disqualified and banished from the ring. It didn't matter because I won the match, and the title, on my own.

With Greg gone, I continued my program with Kelly and dropped the Gulf Coast title to him on January 19, 1972. During that time, I also had the pleasure of going to Memphis on three different occasions to wrestle with Jim Dalton as my partner.

In 1971, I was working in Panama City one night for a promoter named Lou Pericola. Lou was an important man in Panama City. He owned a newspaper there and promoted wrestling in a building called the Rainbow Roller Rink. It was a small building, but they really packed that place with people.

Pericola had a guy working for him named Bobby Wilson. Bobby was Pericola's right-hand man. He ran back and forth taking order from the heels' dressing room to the babyfaces'.

Of course, I was hated there, as I was everywhere else. A couple of brothers would come to the matches and heckle me every week. They hated my guts.

One day, I pulled into a gas station. That was before gas stations became "self-service" and someone else pumped your gas for you. One of the brothers who heckled me at the matches was working there as a gas pump jockey. I pretended I didn't know who he was. I got out of the car and said, "Fill it up."

He said, "I ain't givin' you no gas, Fargo."

I said, "Well, you son-of-a-bitch. You'd better give me some fuckin' gas."

I couldn’t believe it when he took two steps back, held up a cigarette lighter, and pointed the pump nozzle at me. I could have shot him and claimed self-defense, but instead, I backed off.

As he turned around, he said, "That’ what I thought."

When he put the nozzle back onto the pump, I grabbed it and beat him over the head with it. He fell to the ground and, after pounding him with it a few more times, I got into my car and took off.

I had a few hours before I had to leave for the matches, so when I got home, a buddy and I began to drink and get high. We left early so we could stop at a redneck bar in Gulfport we had seen the week before. We were all decked out in biker gear and had painted swastikas on our faces. We got on the dance floor and began dancing and making fun of the people there. When some of them started to leave, the owner came over and told us to get out. We laughed at him, but we did as he said. As we left, we threw our beer bottles over our shoulders. They broke on the dance floor, so the owner called the cops.

What I didn’t realize was, one of the two brothers had been following us. When we walked outside, we saw him break the antenna off my car and hit one of the windows with a rock. When we yelled at him, he jumped into his car and took off. We got into my car and chased him down the highway at a hundred miles an hour.

Eventually, some cops saw us and pulled us over. They took us to jail and put us in a cell … with the brother we had been chasing. They had caught him a few miles closer to the police station shortly after they caught us. The guy totally lost it. "Hey, don’t put them in here with me!"

The cop said, "I’m not here to babysit you or handle your problems. You guys work it out yourselves."

"Please, man! Don’t, don’t, don’t, don’t, don’t!"

The cop looked at us and said, "It’s up to you guys."

I said, "Nah. Leave him here with us. We won’t bother him."

And we didn’t. That guy was scared to death. He cowered down in a corner of the cell.

We were in there for less than 30 minutes when Bobby Wilson walked in. I don’t know how he knew we were there, but he found out about it and immediately called Pericola. "Hey, they got your boys down there in jail."

Pericola asked him, "What do you mean boys?"

"Your main event."

"You mean Fargo is in jail again?"

"Yep."

"God dang."

He told Bobby to go to the police station and talk to the desk clerk. When Bobby got there, he spoke to the desk clerk and then made a phone call. We could see him from our cell. He talked for a few seconds before handing the receiver to the cop. "Yes. Yes, Mr. Pericola. Yes, sir. Yes, sir. Yes, sir, Mr. Pericola."

He hung up the phone, opened a drawer in his desk, and pulled out a set of keys. He opened the cell door, pointed to my friend and me, and said, "You two can go."

The other guy started to walk out with us, but the cop pushed him back in and said, "Where do ya think you’re goin’? You’re stayin’."

I wrestled there for a long time after that, and those two brothers came to the arena every week to heckle us. They didn’t cause us any problems, but they didn’t let up on their heckling.

Just to show you what you can do in wrestling, years later, I went back to Panama City and turned babyface. I had been the most hated son-of-a-bitch in the Gulf Coast territory, and now, I was the most loved.

The two brothers? They came up to me one day and said they wanted to be my friend. They invited me to go deep-sea fishing with them. I said, "Thanks, but no thanks."

I could be wrong, but I'm pretty sure I knew what they wanted to do. That would be one trip from which I wouldn't come back.

In mid-April, I left Mobile. I didn't give any notice. I just left. I'm not proud of it, but I did that a lot. When we left a territory, we were supposed to give a two-week notice. What would happen when you gave notice is the promoter would knock you off. He'd make you do jobs for everybody to a point where you looked so bad that you couldn't ever come back. I was too smart to fall for that. I'd get myself booked in another territory way ahead of time. The promoter who was going to book me would ask, "When can you start?"

I'd say, "Well, if you need, I can start tomorrow."

"When are you finishing up with them?"

"Oh, whenever you want me to come to your territory. They don't care."

And I'd leave, whether they cared or not. I did that to poor Lee Fields so many times. I do feel bad that I did it to him so much because he always took care of me. Whenever I needed a place to go, I'd call Lee. "Hey, Lee! I wanna come back."

He'd say, "I don't know, Fargo. Call me back in a day or two. I've gotta think about it."

He always called me back and brought me in. Lee was so good to me, even though I drove him nuts. I loved working for him. He was so calm, so smooth, and so laid back. I don't remember him ever getting upset. If I were to list the best promoters in order, from one on down, he would be at the very top of the list. He used me when nobody else would. He trusted me when he shouldn't have. And he got me out of jail so many times.

I left a lot of territories without giving notice, but the promoters did the same thing to the boys. A lot of times, we'd go into a territory with a promise from the promoter that we'd be there for a long time. We'd rent furniture and move our families, clothes, and personal belongings to the town. Three weeks later, they'd tell us we needed to find another place to go. Most of the time, they'd give us a couple of weeks notice. We didn't bother to hang around. We would pack and leave the next day, leaving all the things we rented in the apartment. We didn't return anything.

Rick Gibson was a "leave town quickly" type of guy. One time, he was in a hurry to move on to another territory, so he asked me if I minded returning the furniture he had rented. I told him I'd be happy to do it. I didn't go over to his apartment for a few days. Unfortunately, by the time I got there, somebody had broken into his place and the furniture was gone. I didn't see him for a long time, so I didn't say anything about it. I secured the apartment so no one else could get in and left. When he came back into the territory, he confronted me. "My furniture was stolen … and I'll bet you don't know anything about it."

"No, I don't, Rick. It was gone when I got there."

He said, "I asked you to call the rental store and see that it got picked up."

I said, "I was gonna take it back, but what could I do? It wasn't there."

I couldn't believe what he asked next. "Where the hell did you sell it?"

"Rick! I didn't sell it. It was gone when I got there."

In April 1972, I went to work for George Becker in the Carolinas. George Becker had been a main eventer in the Charlotte territory from March 1951 until October 1972, at which time he had a disagreement with Jim Crockett Sr. and left to form his own promotion with Tony Olivas [William Olivas] and Mike Gallagher.

Rip Hawk [Harvey Evers] was booking for Becker at the time. Killer Buddy Austin was there when I arrived in the territory and Becker wanted him to create a feud between Buddy and me. He asked us if Buddy and I could do

an interview together on a local news show. When I told him we would, he asked me if I had any ideas. I told him, "Yeah, I have a great idea."

He wanted to know it was, but I simply told him, "Well, we're gonna work somethin' hot. Don't worry about it. You'll like it."

I didn't tell anybody what I was going to do. Later that day, I asked Buddy, "Can you bust me open the hard way?"

"Yeah, man."

We were sitting opposite each other on the television set. As the announcers asked us questions, we began to argue. We went back and forth, back and forth. I stood up. Buddy stood up. The announcer got wide-eyed, not quite sure where it all was leading. As I went to sit down, Buddy lunged towards me and hit me in the forehead with the microphone. My skin split open and the blood flew. Buddy straddled me and pounded me with his fists, while the announcer yelled for people to come separate us.

Later that day, Rip Hawk called to tell us he wanted to meet Buddy and me at a local restaurant. When we got there, he said, "Becker freaked out when he saw what you did. He didn't like it. Here's the deal … we're gonna give each of you a thousand bucks and get you booked out."

I couldn't believe it. I thought the deal we did on TV was great. Apparently, though, Becker thought it was a bit too much and wanted our names to just disappear from the promotion. I would have preferred to stay, but a thousand dollars was a lot of money back then. I told Rip my concern was where we were going to be booked. "I've got you set up in Buffalo with Pedro Martinez."

I was excited because I loved that territory and I really wanted to go back. Buddy liked the idea, too, so we picked up our girlfriends, packed up our gear, and hit the road.

I really believe the angle we did on television would have drawn money. It's too bad Becker didn't give it a chance because the territory died after

we left. I’m not saying it was because we left, but the houses hit rock bottom and stayed there from that point on.

Buddy, unfortunately, was a heavy drinker. I was a heavy drinker, as well, but his drinking got in the way of doing business. Pedro Martinez fired him shortly after we got there. Pedro called and said, "I hate to do this to you, but Buddy has to go. I’d like you to stay if you want."

I didn’t want to leave, but I thought I’d talk to Buddy about it first. "I’ll talk to Pedro if you want to stay, Buddy. Maybe I can change his mind."

"No, don’t worry about it. You stay here and make some money. I’ll find another place to go."

Greg Valentine had been back in the territory since March, wrestling mostly in single events. When I returned, we picked up where we had left off.

Greg and I lived together in an apartment less than 100 yards from Niagara Falls. I wasn’t used to the cold, though, and it was really cold in the winter. We were so close to the falls that the spray would hit the cars and cover them in a sheet of ice. When we had to go somewhere, we had to chip off the ice. I hated it. Give me the warm, sunny South any day.

I did something really dumb one day. I was in a hurry, so when I saw the thick build-up of ice on my windshield, I went back inside the apartment and heated up a pot of water. Taking it outside, I slowly poured it onto the ice, thinking it would melt it. Well, it did melt the ice, but it also cracked my windshield in about 20 different directions.

I don’t remember the name of the town, but when I was wrestling for Pedro Martinez in the Buffalo territory, we were wrestling in a nice building. I was watching a match between two guys who really stunk up the joint. It was absolutely terrible. The people were actually booing, and that was in the day before people did that kind of thing. Pedro walked up and said, "Those son-of-a-bitches are stinkin’ it up. They’re killin’ the town. Fargo, I’ll give you a hundred bucks if you go down there right now and do something."

"What do you want me to do?"

"Anything. Just get the peoples' minds off that stinkeroo of a match."

I ran downstairs and, after picking up two empty chairs, threw them into the ring. The two guys wrestling stopped what they were doing and stared at me, as if unsure of what they were supposed to do. I got into the ring, picked up one of the chairs, and began pounding them with it. They both left the ring and headed back to the dressing room. None of the fans knew why I had done what I did, but they were excited.

True to his word, Pedro paid me $100.

Greg and I drove to Cleveland one night in a convertible. We were smoking pot (as usual) and Greg was rolling big, thick joints. By the time we got to Cleveland, we were higher than kites. We were so high, in fact, that we drove right through Cleveland and didn't stop until we were smack dab in the center of Pittsburgh. We both saw the "Welcome to Pittsburgh" sign at the same time. We turned and just stared at each other. Pittsburgh was about 130 miles on the other side of Cleveland. We always left early because we liked to get to the towns with time to mess around, but as early as we were, we couldn't get back to Cleveland in time for our match. We rolled into town a few minutes after the matches were over. Oh, we took a raft of shit over that one.

Another time, Ron Martinez, the son of the promoter, Pedro Martinez, bought a brand new Cadillac Convertible. That car was beautiful. Ron wanted to drive us from Pittsburgh to Buffalo. Something came up and he had to fly home, so he asked us if we would drive his car for him. "Oh, yeah! We'd love to."

We got on the expressway and headed north towards Buffalo. We were drinking beer, smoking pot, and listening to loud music. Greg was driving and I was in the back seat … naked. (I shouldn't even have to tell you that by now.) Our plan was to take turns driving so each of us had "naked time" in the back seat. We couldn't have been more than 50 miles outside Buffalo when the engine made a loud clanging noise. We were surprised that something so serious had gone wrong with a new car. Ron had to pay

someone to tow the car all the way to Buffalo. The mechanics at the Cadillac dealership couldn’t find any reason for the engine blowing, so they fixed it and covered all Ron’s expenses.

A few days later, we were talking to Ron and happened to mention the fact that we thought his car ran really smooth at high speeds. His brow furrowed and he asked, "How fast were you driving when the engine blew?"

"About a hundred," said Greg. "That’s nothing for an engine that big."

"You idiots. You have to break in a new car. You shouldn’t have been going more than sixty."

That poor kid. We drove him crazy.

He wasn’t the only one. When Hammer and I did interviews in Buffalo, we drove the director of the program crazy. He was constantly yelling, "Cut! Cut! Cut!" The only people at the interview tapings were the wrestlers and the people who handled the taping. One afternoon, Greg and I walked out to do our promo … stark naked. "Cut! Cut! Cut!" Greg and I just stood there with a dumbfounded look on our faces, as if we couldn’t figure out what the commotion was all about.

Another time, Greg found some thick magic markers behind the set. He poked his head out from behind the curtain and said, "Fargo! Come back here!" He said, "I have a great idea," and told me what he wanted to do.

We were scheduled to do an interview for a match we were going to have with Dominic DeNucci and Tony Parisi the following week. When our names were called, I peeked around the curtain and told the director we didn’t want to come out until the announcer finished the introduction to our promo. When we heard him say, "I have the Fargos here to tell you what they have planned for their opponents this week," we walked out in front of the cameras and yelled, "DeNucci and Parisi! This message is for you." We put our hands on our hips, poked out our chests, and posed for the cameras. Greg had written "FUCK" on my chest and I had written "YOU" on his.

We were wrestling in Buffalo the second time I wore a mask. Greg and I were the NWF tag team champions at the time. Ron Martinez asked me if I would mind working twice. I said, "I'll work five times as long as you pay me."

He paused for a moment, as if he wasn't sure whether or not I was serious. "Well … we'll pay you double if you work twice."

"What do you want me to do?"

He said, "Well, we want you to be Abdullah's manager." Abdullah the Butcher [Larry Shreve] didn't have a manager at the time and, since he didn't talk on promos, he needed someone to use as his mouthpiece. "Can you come up with some kind of a gimmick so the people won't recognize you? You and Johnny have to come back in the main event, so I don't want the people to know it's you."

"Hell, yeah!"

I loved the idea. I had a lot of fun wrestling under a hood in Mobile, so I was excited about doing it again. I had the black mask I had worn when I wrestled as Mr. D in Mobile, so I went out and bought a turtleneck sweater, black pants, black gloves, a walking cane, and a roll of gauze bandages. I put on the mask and wrapped the bandage around my head like a mummy. I left a thin slit so I could see and put sunglasses over it. As an added feature of the disguise, I had something that I put in the back under the sweater so I looked like a hunchback. I looked like Claude Rains in the old Universal Horror movie, The Invisible Man.

I called myself the Black Baron. Abdullah and I went to the ring and did what we were asked to do. I didn't do much more than sit by the ring apron and occasionally pound on the mat. Afterwards, we went to the dressing room so I could change clothes. Ron was waiting for me when we walked in. Hurry up! Hurry up! You've gotta be on the next match." When it was time for the main event, Johnny and I went out to the ring … with no one the wiser. Later, when we did promos, I did all the talking and Abdullah just stood there. In hindsight, I wish I had worn a mask more often during my career than I did.

One of the top guys in Pedro's territory was Johnny Powers [Dennis Waters]. I had met Powers two years earlier when Kenny Mack and I made a shot in Cleveland to wrestle Bruiser and Moose Cholak, and again when Greg and I worked in Cleveland in 1971. From what I understand, Johnny had part ownership of the Buffalo territory with Pedro. I had really been training with the weights when we went in there in 1972. When he saw how cut up I was, he said, "Oh! You should be wearing tights like I used to wear. You have the body for it." Powers was different from the other guys in that he wore the skimpy tights that showed off his ass cheeks. As far as I know, he was the first guy in wrestling to wear that style.

Greg and I wrestled in Buffalo for eight months and left two days after Christmas 1972. When we left, business there was really going downhill, but our main reason for leaving had to do with the fact we were sick and tired of the cold weather. Two weeks later, we were working for the Funks in Amarillo.

When we first got there, we went upstairs in the Amarillo Sports Arena to Senior's office. Senior and Junior were pretty quiet. They didn't have much to say. You had to hammer them pretty hard when it came to reasoning with them.

Two very important historical events took place during this run in Amarillo.

The first took place on February 28, 1973, when Dory Jr. was injured while using a pickup truck to herd cattle on his father's ranch. The truck overturned in a creek and Junior was taken to a hospital in Canyon to be treated for a dislocated shoulder.

The story of the accident wasn't as significant as the controversy surrounding the incident. Funk Jr. was supposed to drop the NWA world title to Jack Brisco four days later, on March 2, in Houston. Even though the NWA promoters had voted to make Brisco the next champion, Funk Sr. didn't want his son losing to a babyface because that would mean Junior had lost to a better wrestler. If Dory Jr. lost to a heel, he could claim he lost the match due to unfair tactics. Senior told Eddie Graham the only way Junior would lose the title would be if he lost it to Harley Race … and that's

what happened. Harley took the strap from Dory on May 24 in Kansas City and, subsequently, Brisco won the title from Race in Houston on July 20.

I didn't have an actual part in the second incident, but the night before it happened, May 31, Greg and I missed a town when we got lost. The next day, the boys all met at the TV station to do promos. When Terry walked in, he came over to ask why we missed the town. Before he could say anything, I told him, "Terry, we need more money. We're not getting paid what we should."

I wasn't upset. I wasn't even complaining. I just thought I'd ask because Greg and I felt like we deserved more than we had been getting.

When Senior arrived a few minutes later, Terry told him what I had said. We were all sitting on the bleachers. I was sitting on the bottom row next to Ricky Romero and Greg. Senior walked around the bleachers and came over to stand in front of me. "I heard you're bitchin' about the payoffs."

"What? I'm not bitchin' about anything ..."

Before I could say another word … SMACK! He nailed me with a fist to my right temple. I stood up, ready to defend myself, which I think shocked him because he expected me to take it without complaint. I didn't know Terry very well at that time. We later became good friends, but I hadn't been around him enough to really get to know him. When I stood up, Terry came over and said, "You want me to take care of this, dad?"

"No, no. Leave it alone."

To this day, I think to myself, "Thank god he calmed down when he did because Senior probably would have killed me." Senior was one tough son-of-a-bitch who didn't back down from anyone when it came to a fight.

That was the only time I ever had an argument with Senior about anything. I really believe he acted the way he did because, when Terry told him what we had said, he assumed that was the reason why we had missed the show the night before. We had been bitching about money, so he tied the two events together and thought we did it on purpose.

I always did what Senior asked without complaint … even when he teamed me up with Hank James, who wasn't a very good worker. James' gimmick was the stereotypical devious, cowardly black man. Needless to say, our styles didn't match up at all.

As soon as everybody arrived at the TV station, Senior gave us our booking sheets and we did our promos. When we finished, Senior made announcement about a party he was having the following night and that everyone was welcome. I walked up to him, apologized for the misunderstanding, and asked, "Am I welcome to come to the party, Mr. Funk?"

He paused for a second, looked at me, and said, "Yeah, we'd love to have you join us. Bring your wife and kids."

We all left for a show in Abilene, wrestled that night, and drove back to Amarillo. The following night, Senior had the party at his Flying Mare Ranch in Umbarger. It was a great party. Funk had a lot of food and booze laid out. Two of the wrestlers there were Nick and Jerry Kozak. I had ridden out to the party on a dirt bike. When Nick saw it, he asked if he could ride it. "Sure." As he climbed up onto the seat, my mind flashed back to the time he had loosened the straps to my saddle when I went horseback riding. I kept thinking that if I had known he was going to ask to ride my dirt bike, I would have taken out the bolts that held the seat to the frame. As it happened, Lady Luck took care of things for me.

Nick drove the bike out into the pasture. A few minutes later, he came back, without the bike and limping. "I'm sorry. I hit something out there in the dark and wrecked."

We went out to look at the bike and the front end was all smashed up. One of the boys had a pickup truck and he offered to take it back to town when we left. Nick offered to pay for the damages, but I told him not to worry about it.

I went back to the house to tell Funk Sr. goodbye. When the guys told me he was in a back room wrestling with Les Thornton and Gordon Nelson

[George Nelson], I told them, "Just tell him I said goodbye and that I'll see him tomorrow."

Shortly after I left, a tragic incident took place; one that made me feel kind of bad, given the problems I had with Senior the day before.

Around ten-thirty, Senior had a heart attack and Dory Jr. rushed him to St. Anthony's Hospital in Amarillo. He died shortly after midnight on March 3. To this day, I think how glad I am that I didn't retaliate when he hit me at the TV studio … for two reasons. One, Terry probably would have beaten the hell out of me, or, two, Senior may have died and I would have been blamed for his death. I thought about that for a long time. I heard he had a physical examination just a few days before he died and the doctor said he was in good shape. He was only 54 years old. That was a sad situation. Junior and Terry took it really hard.

Dory Sr. was a good man. He supported the Boys Ranch with both his money and time, bought toys for children in hospitals, and once gave a terminally ill girl a large sum of money and treated her family to a trip to Six Flags Over Texas amusement park.

To paraphrase the words of the old comic strip, They'll Do It Every Time, I'd like to say, "Thanks and a tip of the hat to Dory Funk Sr." He was a great wrestling promoter, but in my eyes, he was an even better person.

Chapter 21
The Gas Mask

Greg left the Amarillo territory right after our disagreement with Dory Funk Sr. at the TV studio. I don't remember why he left, but he just took off. He spent four months wrestling for Don Owen in Portland and then five months in Buffalo. In November 1973, while he was still in Portland, he changed his name to Greg Valentine. In the years that followed, he had great runs on top in Florida, Los Angeles, Charlotte, and spent several years working for both WCW and the WWF. He was inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame in 2004 and currently makes appearances at wrestling shows and autograph signings.

When Greg left, I spent two weeks teaming with Buck Robley. Robley was a trip. He was always looking for ways to make an extra buck. When someone told him I could draw cartoons, he said, "Let's make a book and call it "Wrestling Humor." You can draw the cartoons, we'll add pictures of the wrestlers, and sell them at the arenas for a coupl'a bucks."

When we asked Dory Jr. if we could do it, he said it would be fine with him. Ricky Romero really liked the idea, too. We had 200 copies printed and, after two weeks, we had sold all but 20 or so. Since they moved so quickly, Buck thought we should print more copies and raise the price. That was a mistake. The people quit buying them and we wound up with a bunch of books we couldn't sell. Buck and I finally split up the books and either sold or gave them away through the years.

Two years later, when I went back to Mobile, I printed another edition with pictures of the wrestlers from the Mobile territory. Lee Fields sold them and did much better than Robley and I had.

Three decades later, I walked into the Gulf Coast Wrestlers Reunion in Mobile. As I walked past the gimmick table, I saw t-shirts, DVDs, VHS tapes, baseball caps, jackets, reunion pictures … and a stack of my books!

The Fields had made copies and were selling them. I wanted to walk over and point out the copyright notice on the inside front cover, but I didn’t say anything. If they were able to sell a few copies and make a few bucks to help support the reunion, I was okay with it.

I ran into Robley again in Pensacola years later. At that time, he had an idea he wanted to try. One night, when the people came into the building, a big cardboard box was sitting at ringside. I could hear the people talking:

"Why is there a box at ringside?"

"I don’t know. What do you think is in it?"

That box sat out there for two weeks. On the third week, before they let anybody into the arena, Robley got into the box. He sat inside that box until the main event began. At a specified time, he came out of the box, hit the ring, and attacked the guy he had been feuding with three weeks before. The people, of course, actually believed he had been sitting in that box for three weeks, just waiting for the right opportunity to catch his opponent off guard.

Sixteen days after Senior died, I left for a tour of Australia. Mark Lewin was booking the territory and he brought me in.

I took a girl to Australia with me. Of course, I was married, but I took her, anyway. She was a nice girl and I really cared for her. Barnett sent us both round-trip, first-class tickets.

Mark met us at the airport and took us to the hotel where we would be staying. The area of town in which we stayed was a real dump. The hotel was right off the main street in an area called Kings Cross, a rough section of Sydney. Buddy Austin used to walk the streets and frequent the bars there all the time, but I didn’t like going out.

I really liked the hotel, though. Barnett put us up in suites, each of which had a kitchenette, complete with a stove and refrigerator, and complimentary beer and wine. The best part of the hotel, though, was they were paid for by Barnett.

Not more than an hour after we arrived in Australia, Mark stopped in and said, "We've gotta leave in about fifteen minutes."

"Where are we going?"

"Melbourne."

"Is that a long drive?" I asked.

"Oh, we don't drive here. We fly."

I was dumbstruck. I thought I'd be home most nights. My girl was upset. "What am I gonna do? I just got here and I don't know anybody. I'll be here all alone."

"We'll only be gone two nights."

Most of the time in Australia, we were gone only two nights, but we occasionally made four shots before returning home. She wasn't happy about being alone, but she stayed with me the whole time I was there.

Flying really got on my nerves. We had to fly to another town every day. The only thing that kept me going was the hash [hashish]. They had good hash over there. We rigged up a gas mask so we could put it over our face and inhale it without letting any escape into the air. Barnett used to sit up front in the airplane with the non-wrestling passengers. We would get in the back and mix hash with tobacco. They still allowed smoking on the airplanes at the time. When the stewardess would disappear into the front section of the plane, Barnett would wave his hand in the air. Mark Lewin would say, "Line up, people," and we'd take turns burying our face in that gas mask. I also drank a lot of beer, wine, and we snorted cocaine. It got so bad that I had trouble doing what I was expected to do in the ring. At times, we'd get back to the hotel and I was so messed up that I'd have to crawl to my room on my hands and knees.

As far as Barnett goes, we didn't have any problems with him regarding our drug use. In fact, Barnett used to carry a box of pills and would hand them out. He liked to keep us drugged and happy.

I wasn’t too crazy about the food in Australia. Big Bad John [William Goodman] took me to Chinese restaurants quite often, but I got tired of that. Later, I discovered vendors who sold whole ducks on the street corners. The ducks were de-feathered and ready to cook. They displayed them by hanging by their necks. When we told them which one we wanted, they’d slice through the neck and hand us the duck. Before I left for the matches in Sydney, I’d take the duck home, season it, wrap it in tin foil, and put it in the oven on low heat. When I got home, it would be cooked perfectly.

Big Bad John was the leader of the "Army," a group made up of Abdullah the Butcher, Waldo Von Erich [Walter Sieber], John, and me. My original intent was to wear a Nazi uniform and wrestle as Herman Von Kalt, but Waldo Von Erich already was using that gimmick there, so I wore dirty levis and a sleeveless shirt. I weighed around 270 at the time. The first night we were there, Big Bad John said, "You look like a big, fat hog." From that time on, they called me "The Hogg." Big Bad John was a big, tall man. He would do an interview, turn and say, "Ain’t that right, Hogg?" and hit me in the chest as hard as he could. It was all I could do to stand there without falling backwards. I stood there and shook my head up and down. "Yea-hhh!"

We were quite the sight on the commercial airlines. Big Bad John wore a chrome helmet and carried a cane. Abdullah the Butcher was … well, Abdullah the Butcher. He had so many scars on his forehead that it looked like a road map. Waldo rounded out the crew with his Gestapo uniform and swastika arm band. We were quite a diverse cast of characters.

One of the places we flew into was Tasmania. We took a commercial airline and landed on a small landing strip in the middle of nowhere. We got off the plane and boarded a small, private aircraft. You have never lived until you have flown over miles and miles of desolate country while sitting shoulder-to-shoulder with nine other beefy wrestlers. We landed at an airport bigger than the previous one, but it still was a dump.

The only prior knowledge I had about Tasmania was the Tasmanian Devil from the Warner Brothers cartoons. When I got there, someone told me they had seen a Tasmanian devil in a remote part of the country. I thought he was ribbing me. "You mean there’s really a Tasmanian devil?"

"Yeah. They’re only the size of a small dog, but they’re pretty nasty creatures."

The thing that struck me the most about Tasmania was the narrow, cobblestone streets. I thought I was back in the 1700s. The hallways in the hotels were so narrow we had to turn sideways to pass each other, and the rooms were about half the size of a standard motel in the States. Each room had a bed in a corner, a small dresser, a closet, and a sink. If you wanted to take a piss or wash your hands (preferably in that order), you had to go down the hall to the community bathroom. The only place I had experienced in the States that would come close to being as far behind the times was West Virginia. We stayed in some real dumps there.

Tasmania may have been behind the times, but the people there packed the arena for wrestling. They loved it.

King Curtis was in Australia while I was there. I first met him in Portland in 1963. At the time, he was a big, handsome man. I don’t know what he did (other than slicing his forehead to ribbons), but he ruined himself. He didn’t look like the good-looking guy I had met ten years earlier.

One day, we missed a flight because of a traffic accident. Later that day, there were news reports about a flock of birds flying into the engine and bringing the flight crashing to the ground. That was my biggest fear … and that’s why I decided to leave Australia. I worried about the odds catching up to me. I don’t know how the pilots and flight attendants do it. It seems like they must always wonder when or if their plane might go down. Every day, we had to fly to another place. I reached a point where I was paranoid to fly, even though I was there for less than a month.

During my last week there, we were wrestling somewhere a little more than 300 miles away from Sydney. I didn’t want to get back on the plane. One of the local boys had driven his car, so I asked him if he’d take me back. I didn’t really know him all that well, but I didn’t think I had anything to lose. He and his wife sat up front, while I sat in the back (I was a good boy and kept my clothes on).

Ten minutes after we left, we were driving into pitch-black darkness. I couldn’t see even the glimmer of a light in any direction. As far ahead as I could see, there was nothing but straight road and inky blackness. I was told it was the bush country. It was aptly named because all I saw were bushes.

It really freaked me out because I was sitting on the left side of the car, and his wife was sitting in front me … but he was driving. The steering wheel was on the right side of the car. I hadn’t been in a car since I arrived in Australia and I wasn’t used to being in a car driven on the "wrong" side of the road.

I knew about the differences in traffic because Mark Lewin told me about it when I first got there. He told me, "Be careful crossing the street because the traffic runs in the reverse direction. It’s the opposite of what it is in the States."

He wasn’t lying because I almost got hit a couple of times when I looked to the left and, not seeing any traffic heading my way, stepped out onto the road. The whole time I was there, I was scared to cross the street. They drive fast there, too.

I left Australia and went back to Amarillo. We had a home there and my kids were in school, so I didn’t want to go anywhere else.

On January 16 in Lubbock, I was in a 20-man battle royal that featured Andre the Giant. I had already wrestled Andre twice that week in tag team matches [with Hank James in Abilene and Killer Karl Kox in Albuquerque] and he was easy to work with. In Lubbock, however, one of the boys body-slammed me and I put my hand on the mat. It was purely an accident, but Andre stepped onto my fingers. Crack! Crack! "Oh, shit!" He broke my forefinger and my bird finger. You can still see, to this day, where they don’t line up exactly as they should, and I have arthritis in both of them.

I didn’t take any time off. I wrestled the next night in Amarillo. A nurse at the hospital taped them together with Popsicle sticks on the top and bottom.

That was standard procedure. We didn’t have health insurance, disability insurance, or guaranteed contracts like they have today. We only got paid

when we wrestled. If we took a night off, we didn’t get paid.

Several times during my career, I cracked my ribs. The doctors would tell me the only thing I could do was tape them up. Thirty years later, I hurt my ribs when I fell off a ladder while painting a mural on a wall. When I went to the doctor, I asked him if I should just tape them up. He said, "Absolutely not. You can get pneumonia by doing that."

I couldn’t believe it! I had been taping my cracked and injured ribs for years.

One night during that time, we had a girl come up to our hotel room. She was really overweight, but the guys didn’t care. What was it the boys used to say? I just want a warm place to put it. When I walked through the door of the room and saw her lying naked in the bed, I had an idea. I loved to pull ribs. I took a Tampax and split it apart. We had just finished eating hamburgers and we had packets of ketchup left over. I put ketchup all over the Tampax and then rubbed some all around my mouth and nose. I told someone to find Dory and tell him I wanted to talk to him. A second before Dory walked into the room, I put my face between the girl’s legs. I sat up and looked over at Dory … with the Tampax hanging out of my mouth. Dory gagged, turned around, ran outside, and puked his guts out.

One of the nicest guys I know is Al Friend, who managed under the name Percival A. Friend. He spent a lot of time in both Amarillo and Kansas City managing the top tag teams. In Amarillo, he managed a masked man called the Patriot [Bobby Hart].

Al’s character was arrogant and condescending. He even played the part when he was on the road by carrying his house telephone with him in his car. He’d put it on his dash and, whenever a car came up from behind to pass him, he’d pick up the receiver, put it to his ear, and pretend like he was talking to someone. That really got a lot of attention because the first hand-held mobile wouldn’t even be invented until the following year, and it would be ten years later before the first mobile phone would be made commercially available.

I felt so bad for him when Dory Funk fired him. I could tell it broke his heart because he lived for the wrestling business, and there weren't many places for managers to go.

One of the guys I really liked to work with was Ricky Romero. Ricky loved to work with me because I never gave him a problem. If he wanted to do something, I went along with it. I didn't care. We wrestled so often that we finally ran out of new ideas. One day, he said, "Let's have a lumberjack match. We can make it a little bit different by having the wrestlers all wear a lumberjack shirt."

I didn't say anything at first, but I thought, "Big deal. It's the same thing they've done here a million times." I said, "How about this? Instead of having wrestlers stationed around the ring, let's let some of the fans stand around ringside with leather belts. If one of us gets out of the ring, they can whip us with the belts."

Ricky loved the idea.

We had a really good crowd that night. When the announcer asked for volunteers from the audience, every hand in the audience went up into the air. They picked eight people, which just so happened to be the exact number of leather belts we had. One of the volunteers was an old woman. She was so dainty. She hit me so softly I didn't even feel it. Everybody else whipped the hell out of me. I loved it. I'd jump out of the ring and the people would lash those belts across my back. Some of the guys whipped me so hard it left welts. The stipulations said that whenever either of us went outside the ring, the fans were supposed to whip us, but when Ricky left the ring, they wouldn't touch him. He'd walk around the ring unmolested. He'd come back into the ring and throw me out, and the people would swing those belts with every bit of strength they could muster. By the end of the match, I was covered in welts. It was a new twist on an old idea and it really got over.

At the end of January, I went to Kansas City for Bob Geigel. I wrestled there for the next seven months, but made occasional trips back and forth to St. Louis and Amarillo.

The Kansas City territory, also known as Central States Wrestling, was owned and run by Bob Geigel, Pat O’Connor and Harley Race. O’Connor didn’t like me at all. His personality was a lot like that of Wilbur Snyder. He was straight-laced and didn’t put up with any crap, and even though I didn’t give him any trouble, he thought I was a trouble-maker.

Okay, I caused a little trouble for him, but I had done worse in other territories.

Regardless of O’Connor’s feelings towards me, he and Geigel really put me over. Harley was good to me, too. I wrestled him in Kansas City for the Central States title on June 27, 1974.

Harley had respect for me and, like Dory Funk Jr. in Mobile, he didn’t want to beat me outright. He talked O’Connor into letting us go through. For the finish, I threw him out of the ring and climbed up onto the top rope. My plan was to jump down on him, only to have him roll out of the way just in the nick of time. Everything went as planned … until my feet hit the concrete floor in a puddle of spilled Coke and my ankle snapped. Harley heard it. He got into the ring and motioned for me to crawl over to the apron. When I got there, he whispered, "We’d better finish this."

I said, "No, no. Let’s go, man. Let’s finish the match the right way."

He said, "Goddamn, Fargo! Are you sure?"

"Yeah. Let’s do it, man."

I didn’t know it was broken. I thought it was just a sprain. We only had five minutes or so left, anyway. I had to push myself to keep going and Harley took good care of me until the bell rang to signal the end of the match.

In the dressing room afterwards, I took a plastic bag filled with ice and packed it on the side of my foot. One of the guys secured it to my leg with a string and helped me get into my van. I drove with my left foot alternating between the accelerator and the brake pedal. I was in a lot of pain. I went to an emergency room and had a doctor take a look at it. After looking at the x-rays, he determined that it was broken. Just like the doctor did when I put

a bullet in my leg, he said they'd have to set it and put it in a cast. This doctor was easier to work with than the other doctor, though. When I asked him, "Can you put the cast over the ankle and just up my calf?," he said, "Sure, I can, but why do you want it like that?"

"Cause I have to wrestle tomorrow night."

He said, "Ah, don't worry. I'll get you fixed up."

That son-of-a-bitch put the cast all the way up to mid-thigh.

I was really getting over in the territory. I was getting top spots against all the other guys — Omar Atlas, Rufus R. Jones, Mike George — and the office stooge, Bulldog Bob Brown.

Bob Brown was the little stool-pigeon, kiss-ass, coffee-carrying, Danish-baking, mother fucker that everybody hated. It was so evident that he was carrying everything that went on in the dressing room back to the office. He'd sit in the dressing room in his white, Fruit of the Loom underwear, with his shoes unlaced, and smoking a pipe. If somebody said something about the office or the promoters, he'd get up and walk out. We all knew exactly where he was going … straight to Geigel or O'Connor.

We decided to fix him one night. I had one of the boys walk into the dressing room and tell him he was wanted up front. Brown left his pipe on the bench where he had been sitting and left. As soon as my lookout gave me the sign, I picked up his pipe, tapped out the tobacco, and filled it with marijuana. I left a little room on top for regular tobacco so he wouldn't notice the difference when he lit up. Now, I wasn't the first one to pull that rib on someone, so I can't take credit for anything other than the execution. I did, however, add my own special touch.

I stuck the bore of the pipe (the part he sucked on) as far as I could into my asshole. I pulled it back out and sat it back down on the bench in the exact position I had found it.

When he walked back in, everybody was sitting quietly. "Dang it." he said. "They didn't want me. Quit fuckin' with me."

The first thing he did was pick up the pipe and light the tobacco. He didn’t notice a thing. Now, I can’t help but believe that if someone brought the stem of a pipe up to their mouth — which, on most people’s faces, is usually located directly under their nose — and it had been greased in shit, they would smell shit. Not Bulldog Bob Brown. He sucked on that stem and smoked like he had never smoked before in his life. He got so stoned that he couldn’t get up onto his feet. When Geigel saw the condition he was in, he wouldn’t let him get into the ring. In fact, he gave Brown a good ass-chewing because he smelled the marijuana and assumed he had brought it with him.

Another night, when we were in Memorial Hall, someone ran across the stage, stark naked, while Bob Brown was wrestling. I don’t know who it was, but I’m pretty sure it was one of the fans. He ran across the stage and out the back door. It was really funny. Ray Stevens’ (the singer, not the wrestler) song, The Streak, had just been released a month or two before and it was being played over and over on the radio. A lot of people did that over the next several years. Needless to say, Brown’s match didn’t get over because the people weren’t paying attention to his match. They were too busy laughing and talking about what they had just seen.

In August, Dick the Bruiser called and asked me to come back to Indianapolis. He wanted me to be a part of a new gimmick. If a promoter wanted me to work for them, all they had to do was mention the words "new gimmick" and I would be on my way there.

When I asked him what it was, he said, "The Legionnaires". The only question I asked was, "How do I dress?"

He said, "Well, a Legionnaire wears a sash around his waist and carries a swagger stick."

I asked him, "Would you mind if I jived it up a little bit?"

"No. When can you get here?"

I told him I’d give my notice and would be there in a couple of weeks, which was around mid-September.

He said, "Great. Do you know Rene Goulet?"

I did because Rene and I had both been in Minneapolis in 1969 when I was wrestling with Kenny Mack. He was a good hand and I had no problem taking him on as my partner.

When I met Goulet, all he had besides his trunks and boots was a cartridge belt around his shoulder and chest. I told him, "If we're gonna be Legionnaires, we're gonna do it right."

Just like I had with all my gimmicks, I researched the French Foreign Legion and printed pictures of what they looked like. I took the pictures to a costume shop and talked to them about ideas for our ring wear. I had a tailor make us custom white, balloon pants, red sashes, and hats. Goulet wore his cartridge belt, as well.

When I left Kansas City, I wore my outfit. I showed up at Bruiser's house in full gear. When he answered the door, he looked at me and said, "Wow!" He loved it. Even Wilbur Snyder liked it. I dressed that way for the next six months. Whenever I left my house, I wore either my Legionnaire outfit or clothes that looked like something a Legionnaire would wear, like a brown shirt, a necktie, and a Legionnaire hat. Just as I had in the past, when I took on a gimmick, I lived the part. Goulet wouldn't do it. He wore his outfit to the ring, but dressed normally the rest of the time. I'd drive up to the arenas all dressed in my gimmick, but he would show up in regular clothes. He didn't treat the gimmick as I would have liked, but I accepted the fact that he was more comfortable doing it his way. Either way, it was a good gimmick.

Goulet was perfect for the role because he spoke French, and since I wanted to live the part, I asked him to teach me some French words and to help me with the accent. He said, "You dummy. The French Foreign Legion isn't made up of just the French. There are people of all nationalities … murderers, rapists, gangsters, and thieves."

Of course, when he said that, I knew the gimmick was right up my alley. Those were my kind of people. Right then, I decided to keep my mouth shut and let him take the lead. I would let him do all the talking on TV. He got a

promotion and became Sgt. Jacques Goulet, while I remained the lowly Private Don Fargo.

When we were on television doing promos, I brought a rifle onto the set and stood behind him in the background. Occasionally, he would turn around and smack me with his swagger stick. "Give me ten pushups, private!" I would lay the rifle down and do pushups. At other times, while he talked, I would do tricks with the rifle, like we did in the Marines. I would roll the rifle over my shoulder, under my armpit, behind my back, and bring it back to the front. I would drop it to my side and kick my leg outwards, catching the rifle on the side and sending it spinning upwards. I loved doing that. It was almost like gun-twirling. While I was doing that, Goulet would be talking. I couldn't tell you a word he said because I wasn't paying attention. I was too busy having fun. When we finished, Bruiser would stop us in the back and say something like, "That was fantastic!" He loved it. And, like everything else I did, Wilbur Snyder hated it.

At first, it seemed odd for the two of us to be doing two entirely different things. Instead of us working together as the Legionnaires, we were doing our own shtick. Goulet was doing his Legionnaire thing and I was doing mine. Surprisingly, it got over.

I weighed the most I ever had while I was in Australia, but when I was a Legionnaire, I began to do sit-ups and a lot of reps with weights. I toned down from 225 pounds to 190 and really was cut. I looked a lot like I did when I competed in the Mr. Pittsburgh contest, although I was heavier and not as lanky. Bruiser didn't like it. In fact, he never cared for the bodybuilder type. He told me, "Kalt, you're a wrestler, not a bodybuilder." He wasn't upset. He was just teasing me, but he did prefer me to be bigger. I eventually had to have a new pair of Legionnaire pants made because they were too big and wouldn't stay up.

Shortly after I arrived in Indianapolis, someone made a call to the wrestling office and threatened to hurt me. A week later, a package containing a bloody rag was sent to the office. Nothing ever came of those two incidents, and I never found out who was behind them, but they did cause me concern while I was there. I was really apprehensive about someone bringing a gun to the arena and taking a shot at us, or of getting stabbed. For a long time

after that, I was looking over my shoulder whenever I walked through crowds.

By late March 1975, the gimmick was getting a little stale, so I began to look for somewhere else to go. Around the same time, Frank Dalton called to ask if he and his girlfriend, Birdie, could stay with me in Indianapolis for awhile. He wanted to know if I would talk to Bruiser about using him. I did the best job I could of selling Frank to Bruiser, but Bruiser hadn't changed his attitude about Frank. I told him, "Frank, why don't I call Dory Funk [Jr.] and see if we can get back into Amarillo? We'll go back in as the Daltons."

Frank liked the idea, so I called Dory and Terry. They liked the idea at first, but they called back after a few days and told me they had changed their minds. Terry told me, "You're welcome to come back … but not as Jack Dalton. We want you here as Don Fargo. And we can't use Frank." I talked him into giving Frank a shot and they gave us a starting date of April 9, 1975.

For the most part, I was booked in the semi-final spot in either singles matches or with Bobby Jaggers [Robert Jeaudoin] as my partner. Frank was relegated to one of the two opening matches and they beat him every night. After a month, Dory and Terry pulled me aside and told me they didn't like Frank's work. It just didn't fit the Amarillo style. I had to relay the bad news to Frank. I told him how sorry I was that things didn't turn out better than we would have liked. He said he understood and disappeared after finishing that week's bookings.

One of the characters in pro wrestling I really liked was Bobby Jaggers. He was in Amarillo when I went back, but the first time I met him, we were on the same team in a six-man tag team match on St. Louis TV. We teamed up several times in the Amarillo territory.

Jaggers was a good guy, but he wasn't hesitant to stick his nose up a promoter's ass if it would get him a bigger push. He could spin more yarns than anybody I ever knew, before or since. I don't know how many were true or how many came from his imagination, but I have to say, I don't think I ever heard him tell a story that wasn't entertaining.

The Funks were true cowboys. They enjoyed riding horses and bulls. Murdoch rode, too, but I don't know if he did it because he liked it, or if he felt like he constantly had to prove himself to the Funks. I heard Funk Jr. talking about the rodeo one day. "It takes fuckin' guts to do something like this." Jaggers decided he wanted to join their club, so he bought a cowboy hat, chaps, and boots.

When a small rodeo outfit came to Amarillo, Bobby decided he was going to ride a Brahma bull. He had never ridden anything in his entire life, but he wanted to prove himself to the Funks and thought that would be the way to do it. I didn't see it, but the story that floated around the dressing room was that the announcer for the rodeo said: "We have a newcomer today … a wrestler named Bobby Jaggers. The gate's open … and here comes Cyclone." Or whatever the name of the bull was. "No! Whoa! Here comes Bobby Jaggers … and now here comes the bull!" The bull threw Bobby before he ever left the gate.

I made a couple of trips with him in the Amarillo territory. He was driving one night after the matches in Lubbock and Dory and Terry were less than a mile ahead of us. At that time, the wrestlers all had CB radios in their cars. They talked all the time. Jaggers, as you would expect, rarely gave anyone else an opportunity to key their mike. There was a big storm in Amarillo that night and it rained buckets. There were floods in a lot of places due to the heavy downpour. Bobby keyed his mike and asked the Funks, "How's the weather there?"

Terry came back. "Just bring it on. Everything's fine."

When Terry and Dory came to an underpass in the road, instead of driving through, they pulled off onto the shoulder of the road, drove up the ridge to the top, and back down the other side. Turning the car around so they were looking back down the road in the direction in which they had come, they stopped and waited. Bobby asked, "How's the underpass?"

"Oh, you're alright. Come on. There's just a little bit of water running through it. You can make it easily."

I was looking ahead. The underpass was really set low into the ground. When I saw it, I noticed a pretty good amount of water flowing through it. "Hey, Bobby. That water looks a little fuckin’ high."

"No, they said we can make it. They’re on the other side of it."

When we reached the entrance to the underpass, Bobby pushed down the gas pedal and drove straight into the water. That water had to have been four feet deep. It came in over the windowsills. We stopped dead in the center of the underpass and the car filled with water. When I looked out through the other side of the underpass, I saw Dory and Terry standing by their truck — a huge four-wheel drive with huge, balloon tires — laughing their asses off. We had to call a tow truck to pull the car out and take it back to town. When they got it out, Bobby opened the door and water poured out. That car was shot.

I hated to hear that he died while he was still a relatively young man. I hadn’t seen him in years and really looked forward to seeing him at Scott Teal’s Tennessee Wrestling Legends Reunion in 2012. When he didn’t show up on the first day of the reunion, Eric Embry called and asked him where he was. Bobby said after he left home [in Kansas] and had driven about halfway there, his wife called to tell him one of his best friends had died, so he turned around. Two days later, on September 30, he died at age 64 after being hospitalized with a blood infection.

Chapter 22
The Truth About Santa Claus

After leaving Amarillo at the end of June 1975, I moved around a lot. I spent one month in Mobile, another in Nashville, and went back to Amarillo in September.

While I was in Mobile, I met a guy named Mike Diamond, a biker who had aspirations of becoming a wrestler. I don’t know if he had actually wrestled before I met him, but Mike was a great bump taker. He became a good worker and listened to everything I told him. Shortly after I began training him, I came up with the idea of him being my manager and me being the brass knuckles champion. I called him Mugsy Malone.

In the mid-’80s, Mike and I wrestled for the OWO promotion as Crazy Mike Diamond and Wildman Don Fargo. When we first teamed together, we decided we had to do something crazy to get our names out there. By that time, the wrestling fans had seen just about everything there was to see — chain matches, cage matches, strap matches, lumberjack matches — and the list goes on and on. I told him, "You know, I was so broke one time that I had to eat dog food to keep from starvin’ to death."

"You’re kiddin’ me, right?"

"No, and I have an idea for somethin’ that will get the people talkin’ about us. We’ll go on TV and eat dog food."

"Bullshit. I’m not eatin’ dog food."

"It don’t taste bad. We only have to eat a bite or two. It won’t hurt you. We have to make believers out of these people ‘cause they don’t believe much of anything any more."

I convinced him to do it. After we did our promo, I took out an unopened can of dog food and a can opener. I wanted the people to see it hadn’t been opened and something substituted in the place of the dog food. We took turns eating spoonfuls. Some jerk at ringside, who had watched us open the can, shouted out, "Ahh, that’s not real dog food."

I threw it at him.

Mike and I wanted to do something special one time, so we got the TV announcer and cameraman to meet us at Cack’s, a bar we frequented in Pensacola. One of my friends owned a limousine and agreed to take us there. Mike and I wore suits that didn’t fit. Our pants were too short, our ties were too long, and our hair was messed up. When Mike, his wife, and I stepped out of the vehicle, the announcer walked up to interview us. He said, "We just heard you guys would be here, so we wanted to come down and interview you."

I said, "Cack’s is our home away from home."

We went inside and they followed us in. Everybody cheered when we walked in. Mike and his wife could really sing well together, so they got up on stage and sang a song. One of my friends had a little girl we called Walrus. She used to sit on my knee at Cack’s. She’s in her fifties now and every time I see her, she talks about that night. The piece aired on local television and it got over really big.

Most pro wrestlers used a move called a "biel," which is when you stand on the side of your opponent and throw him forward, forcing him to flip over and land on his back. I didn’t like that move. I used the arm drag, but not the biel. In my opinion, the biel was a babyface move. I did, however, use it one time … in real life.

I was 60 years old at the time and Mike Diamond and I were drinking at Cack’s bar. Some guy in the bar began making snide comments about wrestling. "So you’re a wrestler, huh? That wrestling’s all fake."

I said, "Go fuck yourself."

He kept on and kept on. I ignored him until I just couldn’t take it any longer. I stood up and said, "You can knock my paintings and anything else I do, but you ain’t gonna knock my business."

I don’t remember using the biel in the ring, but I used it instinctively that night. I don’t know what made me do it. I didn’t plan it. I just did it. When he rushed me, I bieled him up and over, sending him crashing down on top of the pool table. I scrambled up on top of him and hooked him, positioning myself on his shoulders and back and pushing his head towards his knees so he couldn’t breathe. When he began to make scary gasping sounds, I let him go. When he rolled over and pulled himself to his knees, Mike bent over him and said, "How does it feel to get beat by a sixty-year-old man?"

The next day, Mike went to see Rip Tyler and said, "Rip, do you know what Fargo did last night?"

"What?"

"He never, ever bieled anyone in the ring, but he did it to a guy in a fuckin’ bar."

I never did know why, but Mike fell into a depression. I didn’t know it until later, but he thought he had cancer. One Saturday afternoon in 1991, when I asked him if he would be coming to see me on Father’s Day, he said he would be. Later that night, he called and asked me to come drink beer with him. I went over and we had a great time together. Before I left, I reminded him that we were going to get together the next day. "Oh, I won’t forget."

Mike was a redneck (like me). He would go outside every night, sit in a chair he kept in the yard, give a loud rebel call, and shoot his gun into the air. At one o’clock that next morning, his wife called me and said, "Fargo … Mike’s dead."

I couldn’t believe it. I had just left him two hours before. "What? Did he have a heart attack or something?"

"No, he shot himself."

I couldn’t believe it. "Where are you at?"

"The hospital. Can you come pick us up?"

I told her I’d be right there. When I pulled up in front of the hospital, they were sitting outside. When I asked them for more details, they said nobody knew why Mike had killed himself. They had heard the gunshot, but they didn’t check on him right away because he fired his gun every night.

I know this will sound strange, but I asked his wife Katora if I could have the chair Mike sat in when he took his life. It had Mike’s blood on it. She gave it to me and I kept it for a long time. I put it out in the back yard and looked at it every day.

It was during this time that I came up with an idea for a match I knew would generate a lot of talk and interest. I sat down with Rocky McGuire, the Gulf Coast promoter, and told him about an idea I had. "When all the matches are over," I said, "I’ll wrestle in a special match. ‘The first man to tear off the other man’s clothes will be the winner.’"

Rocky liked the idea, but he had to ask me, "You’re gonna have a jockstrap or something on, right?"

"Sure."

The first match took place in Dothan on July 25, 1975. They billed it as a Hell’s Kitchen Street Fight and cameras were banned from the building. I wrestled Tarzan Baxter, who, wrestling as the masked Wrestling Pro, was a legend in the Mobile territory. The match was exciting and the wrestling fans really got into it. Rocky McGuire loved it, as well, and called Lee Fields to tell him about it. A second match, this time between me and Nick Kozak, was booked for Mobile four nights later. Lee had been a bit reluctant to book a match in which the object was to tear off each others’ clothes, but after Rocky assured him that nothing untoward had taken place, Lee relented and agreed to go ahead with it in Mobile.

What Lee (or anybody else) didn’t know was that I had something in mind for the fans that had never been seen in a wrestling match before. The plan

was for me to lose, which was fine by me because that was what I was going to do, regardless of what they asked. Before going to the ring, I took a razor blade and made a shallow slit down each side of my pants legs, around the sleeves where they met the shoulders, the back of my coat, and the back of my shirt. The first thing Nick did when we began to wrestle was grab the sleeve of my coat. It came right off. He stood in the middle of the ring with a sleeve from my coat in his hands and a dumbfounded look on his face. The next thing to go was my other sleeve, and then the whole coat, and finally, my shirt. We wrestled around a bit before I hit the ropes and rebounded off towards him. As he side-stepped and I passed him by, he grabbed my pants. They ripped off as easily as my coat and shirt had.

I stood in the ring … stark naked.

For a building in which there weren't supposed to be any cameras, I never saw so many flashbulbs go off. It was a long walk to the dressing room. I was walking hunched over, with my clothes held in front me, but in the process, I was mooning everybody I passed. The cops weren't quite sure what to do other than gather around me.

Lee Fields was so embarrassed that he left the building and went home. When I walked into the dressing room, Bob Kelly just stood there and said, "What are you gonna do next week? How the hell are you gonna follow that?"

I just laughed and said, "I'll think of somethin'."

In mid-October 1975, Dean Silverstone brought me into Seattle as "The American Dream," but I was only there for about a week. Due to problems with the promotion, Dean was unable to use me, so I made a call to Stu Hart and got booked in Calgary.

I left after two weeks because I couldn't stand the cold weather. We had to wrestle in hockey arenas and there wasn't any heat in the building. They put plywood on the floor over the ice and the ring on top of that. If I wouldn't have looked stupid, I would have worn a coat to the ring. There were no ringside seats and the people were seated really far back in the arenas. We

could have sung songs in the ring and they wouldn’t have been able to hear us.

When Stu Hart told us to be sure we took a box of candles and flashlights with us on our trips, I asked him why we needed to do that. He told me, "If you … ecch … get snowbound … ecch … and your car gets buried, you gotta light the candle to keep you warm and the … the flashlight to shine out the window through the snow."

I went back to Mobile and stayed there from November through the end of January.

During the first week of December, Lee Fields called and asked me if I would like to work in Baton Rouge. I hadn’t been back there since the Charles Cambre incident and I was a bit scared to show my face there. Lee said, "How about it? Jimmy Kilshaw would love to have you back one more time."

Jimmy was the promoter of record in Baton Rouge and had always been good to me. I told Lee, "I don’t know if I want to go back or not. I got into a lot of trouble there."

"You won’t have any problem. Jimmy Kilshaw never would have asked me to book you there if there was going to be a problem."

I agreed to do it and took my wife with me. I wrestled Gorgeous George Jr. in Independence Hall on December 10, 1975. It probably was the worst match I had in my life. The only reason I remember the match was because George tried to out-heel me, and as a result, he really stunk up the joint. I got pissed off and threw him out of the ring. I went out after him and beat him with chairs. The referee had no choice but to disqualify me. That wasn’t what was planned, so there was a bit of heat there.

At the end of the year, I found myself embroiled in a huge controversy as a result of a promo I did on the Dothan [AL] TV show. We were taping promos at a Christian TV station around Christmas 1975. I went out onto the set dressed in my regular clothes and with a cigar in my mouth. I was

laughing as I walked out. The announcer said, "I'd like to talk to Don Fargo about his upcoming match …"

I said, "First of all, I'd like to say hello to all the little rugrats who watch this show. I want to tell you guys something. You know what? I tell the truth all the time. People think I'm lying, but I'm not. The people who lie to you are your parents."

The announcer didn't know where I was going, so he asked, "What do you mean?"

I took the cigar out of my mouth and said, "I'll give you an example. They tell their kids that Santa Claus is real. How can a fat man climb down a chimney with a bag full of presents? I want to tell you kids. I don't smoke." I had a cigar in my hand. "I don't drink. And most of all, I tell the truth. And I'm telling you … there is no Santa Claus. Now, who's the liar?"

I laughed and walked off stage.

Within seconds, the switchboard at the station lit up like a Christmas tree. (no pun intended) Lee Fields told Rocky McGuire, "Get him back out there. He's gotta tell 'em that isn't true and apologize!"

Rocky said, "Fargo, you've gotta get out there and apologize."

To be quite honest, after I walked off the set, I thought about what I did and I felt bad because I didn't want to ruin Christmas for children. I told McGuire, "All right. I will."

I walked out with a big grin on my face and I began to laugh. "Ha, ha! I got you, kids. Oh, I got you, didn't I? Ha, ha, ha! I was fibbin'. Your parents weren't lying. There is a Santa Claus." I paused for effect and said, "But don't let 'em shit you. There ain't no Easter Bunny."

In those day, we couldn't say any curse words on TV, and I said "shit." I thought McGuire was going to have a heart attack. "You made it worse!" he screamed.

I don’t know what got into me that day. I wasn’t drunk. I think I was feeling good and just decided to clown around. I didn’t plan it. I never planned what I was going to say. When I walked out, I started to laugh so I would get everyone’s attention … which it did. I also walked out smoking a cigar, which nobody else did. I thought, "What can I lie about that will get the most attention?" All of a sudden, it grabbed me. The parents!

Rocky later came to me and asked, "Why is it you can do promos on TV stations in Birmingham, Nashville, Mobile, and everywhere else, and the only place you slip up and curse is on a Christian station?"

All I could say was, "I don’t know." And I didn’t. It just came out.

For the most part, I managed to keep my language clean during promos, but I was always afraid I’d accidently use the "F" word on TV. When you use profanity in your everyday speech, it’s hard to not use it when you’re doing an interview. Before we went out to do a promo, we would work ourselves into a rage so it came across as real anger. When we were in that mindset, it was hard to remember that we weren’t supposed to use profanity. We had to think very careful about what we said, especially when the interviews aired live. There were many times when I’d stop in mid-sentence with a curse word on the end of my tongue. One time, I couldn’t stop myself and said, "That mother …" The word came out before I could stop myself, but I was able to change the word that came after it to "trucker." I said "shit" on television one other time, but I changed it right away. "Oh, I mean poop."

In January 1976, I went to Dallas for Fritz von Erich. I had a five-month run there before going to Los Angeles in June. Henry Winkler was hot at the time as "The Fonz" on the TV show Happy Days. I liked the character and could see myself in the leather jacket and t-shirt. It was kind of like "Chain Gang Light." I didn’t want to get sued for using the name, so I didn’t actually call myself "The Fonz." I used the name "Fonzo Fargo."

One night, somebody didn’t show up, so the promoter, Mike LeBell, asked me if I’d work twice. I was just happy to have a place to work, so I told him I would. He said, "Go out and have your match as Fonzo, come back to the dressing room, and change into this Captain America outfit. Then go out and we’ll introduce you as Mr. America #2."

I had seen guys do that before. They would wrestle under their own name, and then they would go back, change their trunks, and put on a mask … and the people wouldn't know the difference. I won't say the people never tumbled to what was going on, but the promoters did that a lot to keep the payroll down. I don't think the people knew it the night I did it, either. I didn't have all the tattoos I do now and I changed my style of wrestling.

I met Roddy Piper [Roderick Toombs] while I was in LA and we lived in the same apartment complex. Even though it was a short trip, we would fly from LA to San Diego and come back that same night. Since we flew, my girlfriend had to stay in town at the motel. Of course, more times than not, I'd get invited to a party and wouldn't fly back with Piper. That poor guy had to make so many excuses for me. She'd demand to know where I was and he'd have to come up with a different sob story each time.

One afternoon, we were waiting in line to board our plane. He was in character wearing the Scottish kilt. There must have been a hundred people sitting around near the gate and I noticed a lot of them watching Piper. After all, it wasn't every day they saw a big guy like Piper wearing a kilt. At some point, I dropped my bag to the floor and, using both hands, picked up his kilt and exposed him to everybody who was watching. Oh, he was mad. He threatened to slap the hell out of me.

One afternoon, Roddy and I were in our motel room. We were bored, so we decided to throw knives at the wall. Roddy threw one and it went through the screen window. That scared us because somebody could have been walking by.

We used to drive Jeff Walton crazy. Jeff ran errands for the promoters, wrote publicity for the promotion, and published the arena programs.

While I was there, I began to paint murals on the walls of the motels. Every time I went to a new motel, I would leave a mural behind as my trademark. I guess it was my version of "Kilroy was here." I didn't ask permission to paint them. I just did it. The managers of the motels didn't mind me painting them once they saw what I was doing. Now and then, one of the boys would say, "Hey, I checked into my room. Would you paint a mural for me, Fargo?"

One day, Jeff stopped by my room and said, "I like the murals you do. Can you paint one in my room?"

"Yeah! I'd love to."

He told me he had to go to San Diego and would be on the road for the rest of the week. I told him not to worry and that he'd love what I had planned. What I didn't tell him was that I was leaving the territory two days later. We both were in San Diego that night. From there, he went on to the next town and I returned to LA.

The next day, I painted all four walls in his room black! Plain, flat, black paint.

When I left LA, I made several shots in St. Louis and just kind of laid low. I didn't have any options to speak of because I had made a few bad decisions and my name was on the promoters' blacklist. That was when Johnny Powers called. Johnny was running a promotion known as the IWA [International Wrestling Association] in opposition to Jim Crockett Sr. At the time, it was known as an "outlaw" promotion and Johnny was fighting tooth-and-nail, both in and out of the courts, to secure arenas in which he could hold his shows. Johnny liked the way I looked and worked and we had gotten along well when we both were working for Pedro Martinez in the Buffalo/Cleveland territory.

As I wrote earlier, Powers used to wear the kind of tights that rode up high on his ass cheeks. He wanted me to wear them and asked me to buy some before I came into the territory. Well, that was right up my alley. I couldn't be naked in the ring, but I was more than willing to show off as much of my butt as I could. He told me where I could get them and I ordered several pairs.

Billy Hines [Billy Yow] also was working for Johnny. His ring years were long behind him, so he was there as a manager. He managed me and Buddy Porter, who was working under the hood as the Golden Gladiator. I had been good friends with both Billy and his brother, Jimmy, when we were working the Mobile territory. Jimmy, the heavier of the two, was better known as Bad Boy Hines. Jimmy could shoot. Billy couldn't do anything,

but he was the brave one because he knew his partner would back him up. Jimmy was killed when he had a heart attack while driving and ran into a tree. At the time of his death, he was out of the business and was selling insurance.

Fourteen years earlier, I had wrestled Jimmy in Dallas. I was drinking and smoking pretty heavily at that time, and earlier that afternoon, I had eaten a big plate of spaghetti. Before our match, someone told Jimmy to go out and shoot with me. When the bell rang, he went behind me and took me down. I was trying to get away, but that little son-of-a-bitch rode me hard. He'd take me down, let me up, and take me back down. One of the worst feelings in the world is trying to keep yourself from blowing up when someone is riding you. The heavy cowboy boots I was wearing made it worse. Before I knew it, I blew up and began to puke. I didn't want to do it in the ring, so I got out of the ring, crawled underneath it, pulled off one of my boots, and puked in it. I stayed there until the referee counted me out.

Billy Hines was a short, little guy who had the reputation of being a mean, little bastard. He also was an alcoholic. When Jimmy died, it messed Billy up and he began to drink heavily. For some reason, he admired me. He didn't know I was coming to work for the IWA. On my first night in, he showed up with two jabronis flanking him … or what I called hangers-on. When he walked into the dressing room and saw me, he stopped dead in his tracks. "Shit, boys," he said, "now we're gonna see some god-dang action around here. You guys won't know him, but you're gonna see some rasslin' and action tonight."

I was on the underneath card that night, but when I went out and began to do all my old stuff, the boys all came out of the dressing room to watch. Of course, I put everything into the match because I knew they were watching.

Billy was in bad shape. He was drinking more heavily than ever and Powers had reached a point where he didn't want to use him, especially since Billy was showing up drunk. A week or two after I got there, Powers fired him. He didn't have anywhere to go, so my wife and I took him in. I kept him away from the booze, made him eat three square meals a day, bought him some new clothes, and took him to the barbershop for a shave and a haircut. After a week or so, he was looking much better.

I had hopes that I could convince Powers that Billy had changed and would be an asset to the promotion. I talked to him one night in Winston-Salem and said, "Listen, I've got him all cleaned up."

"He won't stay that way."

"Yes, he will. I got him cleaned up. Just give him a chance."

Powers didn't make any promises, but I kept hounding him. Before I left that night, I told him, "I'm gonna take him to church this weekend." Yes, as wild and crazy as I was, I went to church as often as I could. I can't say I got a lot out of it at that time, but I think my conscience was nudging me.

I'm not a church-goer, but contrary to what people may think, I am a God-fearing man. While I was at the gym one day, a guy asked me questions about what I believed. He told me, "You need to go to church and pray to God for forgiveness." I believe in Jesus Christ and I believe he died for our sins. I don't think that means we can go around killing people, but it does mean we've been forgiven for sins we've committed and that God will forgive us for sins we commit in the future. As I get older, I think more and more about things like that.

On that particular Sunday, though, we walked into the church and found a seat near the back. We hadn't been seated for more than two minutes when I looked over to see Billy sucking on a straw that poked out from underneath his jacket lapel. He had a bottle of whiskey in his pocket and was sipping from it. The service had begun, so I couldn't get it away from him without making a scene. It was one of those churches that preaches fire and brimstone, and when the preacher began to talk about damnation, Billy stood up and said loudly, "Oh, bullshit," and walked out.

Sad to say, I don't know what happened to Billy after that. He went to our house, got his stuff, and left. He was gone when we got home. I never saw him again. I tried my best, but he fooled me and thwarted my best efforts to help him.

While I was working for the IWA, I married Birdie, Frank Dalton's former girlfriend.

My first wife, Joanne, had left me shortly after I got home from Australia. Joanne was a good girl and a wonderful person. She had to be to put up with my antics. She took care of me and did a great job of raising our children. I didn't neglect her, but like a lot of the guys, I played around. She got involved with a church and the people there saw me on television. They assumed I was an evil person (like my ring persona) and convinced her that I was no good for her. I didn't know it until it was all over because I was gone most of the time. By the time I realized she was leaving, it was too late to change her mind.

I first met Frank Dalton's girlfriend, Birdie, when she was hanging around the back door of the TV station in Pensacola. At the time, she was just 15 years old. Sometime after that, she began dating Frank, but I didn't know that until she showed up on my doorstep in Indianapolis with Frank.

I don't remember how Birdie and I got together, but we wound up together sometime after Frank and Birdie left Amarillo. Most likely, we began dating when I was in Mobile in November 1975 and our relationship grew from there. That caused some heat between Frank and me, but it was just one of those things.

Frank disappeared when he left Amarillo and I didn't see him again until years later when the WWF came to Amarillo. I was in the dressing room when he walked in. I was so glad to see him. I said, "Frank! How're you doin'?"

He said, "Okay, how about you?"

We sat down and talked as if nothing had ever happened. I had always felt guilty about the situation with Birdie, so I told him, "I'm sorry about what happened. Maybe you oughta call her," and I gave him her phone number. I caught hell for that from Birdie.

I worked for Johnny Powers for about four months. He was only running about three shows a week and I couldn't make a living on that. Fortunately, after three months, I got a call from Don Carson [Don Gaston], who was booking in Halifax. He said he wanted me to come in as a rough, tough truck driver. I didn't tell him, but once again, I was going to put my own

spin on the gimmick. I wasn’t going to be just a truck driver. I was going to be a union organizer. I wore a cap and carried a short baseball bat.

While I was there, I returned to my old ways of doing hardways. My eyes were swollen almost shut for the entire two months I was there. I used the bat on my opponents — Nick DiCarlo, Stonewall Jackson, and Don Carson — and let them use it on me. We didn’t pull any punches. We laid them in. It looked real because it was real. Carson loved it.

Carson helped me get into a nice apartment in the complex where he lived. I painted murals on every wall.

The worst riot I ever was in happened during that run in Halifax. We were wrestling in a hockey arena and some hockey players were there. They were big fans and their presence brought hockey fans to the matches, as well. When one of the players got upset over something that happened in the ring, he ran down to ringside and, reaching through the ropes, grabbed the leg of one of the wrestlers. Unfortunately, out of the four wrestlers in the ring, he made the worst selection he could have made, because he picked the leg of David Shultz. David was, and is, a legitimate bad ass. If I was going to pick a fight with someone, he would be the absolute last guy I would pick.

As soon as David felt the guy’s hands around his ankle, he slid through the ropes and began to wail the hell out of the guy. The next thing I know, the hockey players are running down the aisles with hockey sticks in their hands. I grabbed my baseball bat from the timekeeper’s table and joined right in. It was one hell of a fight.

I used the sleeper hold while I was there. I liked that hold, but I didn’t get to use it much because, in most territories, somebody else was already using it. That was Ken Lucas’ favorite hold, so I never got to use it in Mobile. It used to make me mad when somebody in a territory had a pet hold and one of the underneath guys would use it during their match. When they came to the back, the guy would say, "You know that’s my hold! Now what the fuck am I gonna do?" I wouldn’t do that to anyone. There were times when a promoter would tell me, "Go over with the sleeper," and I’d refuse. "No, I’m not gonna do it. That’s Kenny’s hold."

People think the sleeper is a bullshit hold, but it’s the real deal. When applied correctly, it can be used to put someone out. I demonstrated it on a lot of people, but I didn’t like to do it. It could be dangerous.

One night in Halifax, Birdie and I were invited to a party by some fans I knew pretty well. There was a pretty big kid there who didn’t look like he was all there in the head. He kept bugging me. "Wrestling’s all bullshit. It’s not real," and "That sleeper hold can’t be done." No matter what I said, he wouldn’t believe me. He finally said, "Why don’t you put it on me and prove it?"

I said, "No, I don’t want to."

I wasn’t there to prove anything. I was there to have a good time. It didn’t seem as if anything I said would convince him otherwise, so as far as I was concerned, he could continue to believe what he wanted to believe. He kept on and kept on until I finally said, "All right. If it’ll shut you up, I’ll do it."

I told him, "When you feel like you’re goin’ out, reach up and tap my arm or somethin’." I moved around behind him, put my arms around his head, and cranked down on his neck. He just stood there, like an idiot. Not more than two seconds passed before he tapped my arm. I was somewhat pissed off because I had put up with his crap for quite awhile, so I was in the moment. I wasn’t going to let him off too easily. When another few seconds passed by, the people were yelling things like, "Hey, let him go!" I acted like I didn’t know what they were talking about. "What?"

"He tapped out."

I looked confused, and then, finally, said, "Oh," and let him go. When I did, he fell to the floor and went into a fit of shaking. That happened often when we put a guy to sleep, but he didn’t quit. He just kept shaking. A woman walked over and asked me, "What did you do to him? He has epilepsy."

"What? Why the hell didn’t he tell me that, or why didn’t one of you say something before it got to the point it did? The kid kept pesterin’ me and you people heard it."

The kid finally quit shaking and came out of it. I grabbed my old lady by the hand and we left the building. Not only did I leave the building, but I left Canada. I didn't give any notice and I didn't tell anyone. I just left.

I never did that again, even though I had many people ask me to do it. Even when I told them I almost killed a guy, they continue to bug me about it. They could talk all they wanted, but I wasn't going to take a chance like that again.

I had a good three-month run in Halifax as the IWA Canadian champion and, shortly before I left, the brass-knucks champ.

With nothing in the works, I called Lee Fields, who very seldom failed to give me work when I needed it. I owe a lot to Lee because there were times when I was desperate for money and he gave me a spot in the Mobile territory. For the next two months, from September 6 through November 1, 1977, I worked almost exclusively with either Ken Lucas or Johnny Eagles [Roy N. Boyd].

In November 1977, Birdie and I left Mobile and moved back to Amarillo. I'm probably the only person in the world who would have had the balls to do what I did when we got there. I called Joanne, my ex-wife, and asked her if she would let my new wife and me move in with her until we could afford our own place. To my surprise, she agreed. Joanne was a good woman. We got along and talked occasionally after we got divorced. She was a good wife and a good mother to my two daughters, Maryann and Linda.

By chance, soon after we arrived, I ran into an ex-wrestler named Al Lovelock, who had made quite a name for himself in wrestling as the Great Bolo. Al retired from the ring in the '60s and had opened up a bar on the outskirts of Amarillo. He offered me a job helping with him odds and ends, which I gratefully accepted.

One day while I was there, Lovelock told me, "There's a guy comin' in tonight you need to keep your eye on. He comes in every so often and thinks he's bad. He knows karate … or, at least, he thinks he does. Just be careful because he's a mean son-of-a-bitch."

Later that night, I was sweeping the floor when Lovelock walked up and said, "He’s here."

"Where?"

He pointed and said, "He’s sittin’ over there, drinkin’ and starin’ at you."

When I looked over, he downed a shot of whiskey and looked directly at me. Lovelock said, "Just ignore him. Give him time. He’ll come over to see you."

Sure enough, he drank about six or seven courage shots before he got up and walked over to me. The first words out of his mouth were the words I had heard so many times from so many other so-called tough guys, "So you’re a wrestler, huh?"

"Yeah."

He said, "What would you do if I did this?" He yelled "Heeyah!" and brought his foot up. Before he could kick me, I hooked it, turned him over, and spun around to his side, hoping he’d take the bait and grab me in a side headlock. He did exactly that. With my right arm around his waist, I lifted him up and suplexed him backwards. His head hit the pool table and he slumped to the floor.

Al Lovelock had a shocked look on his face. When I stepped over the guy’s body, Al handed me a shot of whiskey and said, "I think you taught him a lesson, Fargo."

I sat down at a table and watched the guy for several minutes. He didn’t move a muscle. He just laid there while four guys continued their game of pool. Nobody tried to help him or move him. They simply stepped over him when it was their turn to take a shot.

Eventually, I went to the back to do some stock work. When I came back out, Lovelock said, "Hey, that guy you put down is over there in a booth. He wants to talk to you."

I went over, sat down, and he introduced himself. "I’m Earl White. I just want you to know, nobody ever did anything like that to me. How did you do it?"

I talked a little about wrestling and the things I learned while I was in the game. He said, "I wanna learn that stuff. I’d like to be a wrestler. Fuck this kung fu shit."

When I told him I didn’t have a place to teach him, he said, "I have a good friend who runs a judo school. He’ll let us use his mats." Sure enough, his friends gave him a copy of the key to the school.

When I asked Earl about his background, he told me he drove a truck and delivered beer for Budweiser. I told him, "Here’s the deal. Bring me a case of beer every day and, in return, I’ll train you to wrestle." Sure enough, he brought beer to my house each day before we trained.

One day, he came to the house and I could tell he was either drunk or high. He really was messed up. He said, "I’ve got some more beer in the trunk."

I said, "You just gave me beer yesterday."

"I got some more. Come on. Come on. Let’s go out to the car."

For some reason, he couldn’t get the trunk open. He was cursing and yelling at it. I said, "Don’t worry about it. I don’t need it right now."

"Oh, no, no, no. I’ve got something that’ll open it."

He reached into the back seat of the car and pulled out an axe. He walked back to the trunk and began chopping at the lock. He really messed it up. When the trunk finally popped open, he pulled out a case of beer and gave it to me. "Do you have some rope?"

"Sure," I said.

He used it to tie down the trunk lid so he could drive home.

When he left, I thought, "This is my kinda guy. He's a nut, just like me." I was more than determined than ever to train him … and he was going to be my new partner. I thought a good place to break in Earl would be the Nashville territory, so I called Nick Gulas and got us booked with an April start date.

Before we made our debut, I met a guy named Louie Heinemann. I was in a bar in Amarillo when I looked up and saw him. He had a look about him that fit our gimmick perfectly. I didn't smarten him up right away, but I talked to him about being our manager. He jumped at the opportunity. I called him Las Vegas Louie.

Nick Gulas agreed to pay my airfare to Nashville, but he wouldn't pick up the tab for Earl or Louie. Louie was so excited about it that he bought the ticket without question. I went to Tennessee a few days before them and wrestled as Don Fargo. My original plan was to go in as Don and Ron Fargo, but Jackie got wind of it and told Nick he didn't want us using the Fargo name. I always agreed with Jackie's wishes when it came to the Fargo name, so we changed our name to Don and Ron Garfield.

I wanted to make everything perfect for our debut, so I went all out. I bought nice suits, sunglasses, and briefcases we could carry. We had our hair styled. When I had everything just the way I wanted, I called Scott Teal to do a photo session with us. He took a whole series of great pictures … at the gym, at a park, by a swimming pool, and at the TV studio.

Our run in Nashville lasted two and a half months, and it would have gone longer if Louie hadn't screwed it all up. Louie started hanging around the office and became an office stooge. He thought so much of himself that he thought he could make it work without me, and convinced Ron they could go out on their own. Louie found himself out of the wrestling business in a matter of months. I don't know where Louie is today. What I do know is, after a short run in Nashville, he never did anything else in the wrestling. He cut his own throat.

Randy Savage [Randy Poffo] was in Nashville during that time. He was just getting started in the business when I first met him. I knew his dad [Angelo Poffo] really well because we had been tag-team partners a few times in the

Pittsburgh territory in 1953. Randy had heard about my paintings, so he asked me if I would paint a picture of him. He said he was going to begin calling himself Macho Man and wanted me to paint "Macho Man" in big letters at the top. I drew a picture of him all muscled up and he took it with him everywhere he went to use as publicity.

I didn’t miss a beat after the Las Vegas Louie fiasco. Jerry Jarrett booked me into Memphis and I spent eleven months there with Al Greene [Al Denny] as my manager. I feuded with Tommy Gilbert over the Southern heavyweight title and even got back together for a time with Chris Colt as my partner.

In September 1978, I decided to take a month off. I don’t remember how it happened, but someone called and said they needed someone to work some shots for Bill Watts. I thought it might be fun to make a few shots in his territory, so they told me to be in Jackson, Mississippi later that week. While I was sitting in the dressing room, somebody walked up and handed me a telephone. It was an early model of a cell phone, but it looked like a military walkie talkie. I had never seen one before, so I asked him, "What the hell is this?"

"It’s a phone. Watts wants to talk to you."

I put the phone to my ear and said, "Hello?"

The first thing he said was, "Kalt?" I hadn’t heard that in a long time, but I knew right away that it was Watts. "I didn’t want you here, but since you’re already here, I want you to go out there and have a good match. I don’t want any of your bullshit. I don’t want any fuckin’ funny stuff and, above all, don’t do nothin’ nasty. Just wrestle, and tomorrow, I’ll pay you, and then you can leave."

Thirty-one years later, I went to the NWA Legends Fanfest in Charlotte and I heard someone say, "Hey, Kalt!"

I turned around and saw this old man looking at me. I didn’t recognize him at first, but when he said, "Bill Watts," I recognized him immediately. He shook my hand, asked me how I was doing, and talked really nice to me.

Back in 1978, though, Watts pissed me off when he was so rude to me. I never would have driven all the way to Jackson if I had known he was only going to use me for one shot. I knew George Culkin was promoting opposition to Watts in Jackson, so I gave him a call to see if he could use me for a couple of weeks. He told me to come by his house the next day and he'd give me some bookings.

Frankie Cain, who wrestled as the Great Mephisto, was booking for George at the time. I made a lot of trips with Frankie in 1960 when we were both working in Nashville. He was amazed because my trunk was always full of handguns and rifles. I wanted to do something different and tried to sell him on doing rounds, like in boxing, rather than pinfalls. Frankie said, "That's too much like boxing."

"Not the way I'm gonna do it."

He asked me, "What do you mean?"

I said, "We're actually going to wear brass knuckles."

"God! You can't do that!"

"The fuck we can't."

"How in the hell are you going to do that? If either of you hits the other with brass knuckles, you've gotta bleed."

"That's right. We're gonna bleed. At least, I am. I'm gonna be the convincer."

Frankie loved the idea. One of the towns he booked was the the small town of Greenville. There were a lot of black people there, so he booked me with Jim Harris, who later became Kamala. Harris was just getting his feet wet in the business and was wrestling as Ugly Bear Harris. He was as green as green could be. As much as I enjoyed getting blood the old-fashioned way, I wasn't about to let a greenie bust me open the hard way, especially one who didn't even know what "hard way" meant.

On the way there, I told Mike Diamond to pull over to the side of the road. "I need you to go ahead and bust me open so all Harris will have to do is hit it." I tilted my head back and pointed to a spot above my right eye. "Hit me right here." He hits me with his knuckles, but girls could hit harder than he did. "Goddammit! Hit me! It'll break open if you'll just hit me."

"I don't wanna hurt you."

"Will you just fuckin' hit me? I just want you to get it started so it'll break open easily later."

BAM! I thought he hit me with a sledgehammer. His knuckles split me wide open. I said, "Oh, god! Goddammit! I said just get it started!"

Blood poured down my face and we couldn't get it to stop. All I could think was, I can't go to the matches all bloody.

He looked at me and said, "You look like you just came from a fight … and you lost."

I said, "I always look like that. I look worse now."

He leaned over and blew on it. I said, "That ain't gonna do no good! Get somethin' to sponge it up with."

He took off his shirt and pressed it to my forehead until it stopped bleeding. I always carried Nu Skin with me for occasions just like that. It burns like hell, but it does the job. He put it on me and it hurt worse than the punch.

I don't know what the people in Greenville thought when we rolled into town. Neither Mike nor I had any money, and at the time, I owned a beat-up old Chevy. You could see the road through big holes in the floor and the windshield had been knocked out. We had windshield wipers, but no windshield. There I was, the brass-knuckles champion of the world, with a big trophy hanging out the window, riding into town in a piece-of-shit car. When we pulled into the parking lot of the arena, we saw nothing but nice, new cars and trucks, and there we were driving a clunker that went, "Boom, bang, pop!"

When we walked into the dressing room, Frankie Cain looked at me and said, "How many of them brass-knuckles matches did you have this morning?"

It was then I realized that I had left the brass knuckles sitting on my kitchen table. Mike said, "What the hell are we gonna do?"

I said, "Let's go back out to the car." We had all kinds of hardware in the trunk — hammers, screwdrivers, bolts, and electrical tape. We put bolts between each of my fingers with the screw end facing outwards and taped them into place. I told Mike, "Go over to the other dressing room and fix Harris up the same way." James was scared to death when Mike told him what he was going to do.

When I went out to the ring, I walked around ringside and let the people at ringside feel the bolts. I didn't want anybody to think we were using plastic or foam. When the bell rang to start the match, I ran over to James and danced around. We hooked up and I told him, "Settle down. I'm not gonna hurt ya. I want to be the punching bag." I was going to beat him, so I wanted him to look good before that happened. I told him what to do. "Hit me in the side of the head. Okay, now hit me over my right eye."

James didn't know I had cut myself earlier. When he hit me, the gash above my eye opened and the blood began to flow. I staggered around the ring and bled puddles, but I watched him as he stood there. If you've ever seen the old horror movies where a black guy sees a ghost, that's the way James looked. His mouth dropped open and his eyes opened wide. I loved every minute of it. I knew that if I had convinced James, I had convinced the audience. We ended the match by having the referee disqualify me when Mike interfered.

The following night, we were in another small town in Mississippi and I was booked against Frankie Cain. Frankie loved the brass-knuckles stuff as much as I did. We got into the ring with brass knucks on our hands, but the cops came in and stopped us. They wouldn't allow us to use them. We had to go to the back and tape up our fists. If anybody loved pain as much as I did, it was Frankie Cain. He loved it! We stood in the center of the ring and beat the living shit out of each other. It was brutal. Many times, when I

would bleed, people would run to the ring and wipe up some of the blood with a rag. That night, they didn’t come near us. When the bell rang to end the match, there wasn’t a square inch of our bodies that wasn’t smeared with blood.

Chapter 23
Farmer Don

I returned to Memphis in October and, when my bookings dried up in March the following year, I returned to Nashville as a babyface and wrestled with a variety of partners against Tojo Yamamoto and Gypsy Joe. I also teamed with the Mexican Angel [Francisco Flores] to wrestle a series of matches against the young, up-and-coming team of Terry Gordy and Michael Hayes, who would go on to fame as the Fabulous Freebirds.

When I went to work for Gulas, Birdie and I moved to Murfreesboro, a small town about 30 miles southeast of Nashville. It's a good-sized town now, but it was pretty small at the time. While we were there, we met a guy who told us we could live in an old, run-down farm house he owned if we would clean and fix it up. I loved the idea because I always had a dream of being a redneck farmer. When my mother and father passed away, they left me a lot of antique furniture. Like always, Birdie and I were broke, so I had sold it all in order to keep up our lifestyle. I figured we could live on that money until the farm began to pay off. We bought pigs and chickens. We planted corn, beans, okra, squash, and quite a few other crops.

We were visited by many of the people who lived in and farmed the surrounding area. They all were really nice and, since I was a new face in the area, they invited me to attend church. A lot of the people knew who I was because they had seen me on television, but nobody was aware of my lifestyle, so I was on my best behavior.

While I was there, I joined the Ku Klux Klan. You know, when you're young and dumb, you do stupid things. That was one of the more stupid things I did. It actually caused me a lot of trouble and brought a lot of heat on me.

I'm not trying to defend the Klan because they did a lot of bad things in the old days, but people don't realize they also did a lot of good, and the Klan

today does a lot of good.

The people in the Klan aren't all bad people. Just like any group, however — politics, sports, religion — they do have their share of bad pennies. It's up to the individual to live his life in a manner that benefits society. I didn't do anything wrong when I was a member of the Klan. We didn't harass black people, we didn't burn crosses, and we didn't hurt anyone. Okay, we burned one cross … in Nick Gulas' yard.

What we did do were things people never hear about. We got phone calls from people who told us about men beating up their wives, or abusing children. We got more calls about child abuse than anything else. After checking with our law enforcement contacts and verifying the information was correct, we would pay the guilty parties a visit. We didn't beat them or threaten them. We simply made it understood that there were consequences to actions. By the time we left, they understood our message. If we saw someone treating someone badly in public, like in a restaurant, we'd walk by, drop a card on the table that said "The Klan is watching you," and keep walking. That was the extent of our threats and intimidation.

I really enjoyed the laid-back lifestyle of farming, but like just about everybody who gets involved in wrestling, you just can't get it out of your blood. Your mind constantly goes back to it. I wrestled occasionally for Nick Gulas to make enough money to cover our expenses.

One day, I met a guy who had promoted wrestling in West Virginia. He stored the wrestling ring he had used in a metal building he owned in downtown Murfreesboro. I asked him if he would sell me the ring so I could start a wrestling school. He liked the idea, but he didn't want to sell it. He did, however, let me use it and his building.

I set up the ring and put an ad in the local newspaper listing a date for tryouts. Three or four guys showed up. I had no idea how much to charge them, so I talked to each one individually and charged them based on what I thought they could afford. I wasn't unreasonable. If they didn't have much money, I'd charge them $100, or I offered to trade for guns, knives or swords. I collected those things, so it was a win-win situation for both of us.

One of the guys gave me a beautiful diamond ring. I had it appraised and it was worth a good bit of money, so I sold it and split the proceeds with him.

A couple of the guys were pretty good, but they were small and skinny. One of them, in particular, was a natural. He was built a lot like Ricki Starr and he could do everything Ricki could. He did back flips and front flips. I asked him, "If I throw you into the ropes, can you flip upside down and hang from them like a friend of mine used to?"

He asked me, "What do you mean?"

I said, "I'll throw you into the ropes. Before you hit them, do a forward flip and come down with your legs hanging over the top rope."

He said, "I'll try it."

He did it on the first try. I yelled, "Wow!" It immediately brought memories flooding back of Ricki Starr and Ray Stevens. "Ricki could climb up the turnbuckle and walk the top rope like a tightrope walker, but he would run across. Can you do that?"

He said, "I can try."

He didn't just try. He did it. He was a little wobbly, but he walked from one side to the other. We tried a couple of moves from the top rope and he nailed them, as well. That kid was my star. When I left Nashville (more on that later), I didn't see him again for several years. When I did, I was training kids at Sika Anoa'I's wrestling school in Pensacola. The kid heard about me being there and showed up one day. I couldn't believe it when I saw him. When I asked him if he wanted to wrestle, he said he was just passing through. I said, "Do me a favor. Show these idiots here what you can do." I was training a bunch of melon heads who didn't know shit. "Can you still walk the ropes?"

"Yeah."

"Can you still take that high back body-drop?"

"Yeah."

He did all that in front of the students for me. They just sat there in amazement.

I had two reasons for opening the training school. I wanted to make money (my inheritance was rapidly running out) and keep my hand in wrestling. I never considered running shows. After a few weeks, though, the thought of running my own shows began to run through my mind constantly.

Shortly after I began training the kids, a Christian radio station heard about what I was doing and asked me to come on the air and let them interview me. They wanted me to talk about how Christ had changed my life. I just couldn't do that because, in all sincerity, I hadn't changed. I believed in God, Jesus and the Bible, and I had changed my lifestyle somewhat, but I just couldn't bring myself to get on television and say things that weren't true."

I told the guy who was going to interview me, "I'll do the interview, but I prefer to talk about wrestling." So, that's what we did. We talked about wrestling. Every once in awhile, though, he'd catch me off guard and sneak in a question about religion, or my conversion experience. I'd answer with a "Yeah," or with as few words as possible, and then I'd steer him back to the subject of wrestling.

The show really got over. The word had spread that I was going to be on the show and they had a lot of listeners. The host of the show gave me an opportunity to plug my wrestling show and tell the people when and where it would be held.

I didn't have any name wrestlers and, by the time I was thinking about running a show, most of the guys I was training had quit. I decided to recruit my Klan brothers and teach them. Many of them were big, burly guys who could hold their own in a fight, so I figured they would be perfect for the wrestling business. Believe it or not, they turned out to be really good. They never wrestled on any show other than my own, but they had talent and, with more training, could have wrestled for any of the territorial promotions.

I knew they wouldn’t be going any further, so I didn’t smarten them up completely. I didn’t want to tell them any more about the wrestling business than they absolutely had to know to present a good match that would entertain the people who bought tickets.

What I did tell them was, "You have to protect your partner," which was the word I used when I talked about their opponents. They had to make it look like they were trying to kill each other, but do only enough to make it look real to the fans. I taught them how to do a hardway. When I showed them that, one guy, who had won a tough-man contest, said, "You mean we can hit each other in the eye?"

I said, "Yeah, but you have to control it. You don’t want to hurt your partner."

The toughest thing about teaching guys like that was figuring out how to explain things, to get them to do what you wanted, without exposing the wrestling business completely. To make a long story short, those guys learned how to fly and do all kinds of things. They really were good.

I knew I had to bring in a name wrestler, so I called Ron Garfield and brought him in for the night. I ran just that one show under the name "Don Fargo Presents …" and we had a sellout house. Ron and I wrestled that night and all the guys I had trained were sitting in the audience during our match. Garfield and I had been together for a long time, so we instinctively clicked when we began wrestling. More importantly, he was a hardway man. When the bell rang, we did a few wrestling moves before breaking out into all-out war. We busted each other open and the blood flowed. Our match was so intense that my Klan brothers wanted to get into the ring and kill him. They rushed down to the ring and beat their fists on the ring apron.

Now this is something people don’t realize about the Klan. We packed the house that night and I brought in a lot of money, every bit of which went to the Klan, who, in turn, donated it to charity. Birdie wasn’t too crazy about me turning all the money over to them. She was fine until we had the sellout and she heard how much the gate was. When she learned that, she got pretty steamed up about it. "That’s a lot of money. You’re turnin’ it all over to them?"

"Well, I promised them I would. You know I’m a man of my word. When I say I’m gonna do somethin’, I do it."

"Sure, but that’s a lot of money. As bad as we need money and you gave it all to them?"

Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

One person who didn’t like the idea of me promoting was Nick Gulas. Since the 1940s, he protected and ruled his territory with an iron fist. I was still wrestling for him at the time, which he looked at as a conflict of interests.

Not so surprisingly, that was when my real problems began.

I never had a problem with the man who lived next door to me, other than the fact he played his music so loud, it rattled our windows. He had it cranked up so loud one night that I decided to walk over to ask if he would turn it down. I was going target shooting the next day and had my gun strapped to my side. We had a few words and I left. The next thing I knew, the police were at my door. He had called and told them I had a gun and had threatened him. They left after I explained the situation.

Two nights later, I went to wrestle in Louisville. Jackie asked me to pick up two cases of whiskey from a guy who sold it to him cheap. On the way back to Nashville, a Tennessee highway patrolman pulled me over and searched my car. When they found the booze, they charged me with transporting liquor over the state line. I don’t think Jackie knew anything about it, but I do think he told Nick he had asked me to bring it back and Nick made a few phone calls. The next day, Nick called to tell me he couldn’t use me and that I should leave town. I told him he should have sexual relations with himself and hung up.

My friends in the Klan were really pissed when I told them Nick had fired me. "Well, hell! We’re gonna do somethin’ about this." They didn’t tell me what they planned to do, but they told me they would see me later that night. A few hours later, they picked me up at my apartment and drove to the Nashville Fairgrounds. There were about 15 of us. When I asked them

what they were going to do, they said, "We’re goin’ to the rasslin’ matches." We all put on our hats and t-shirts with KKK printed on them, bought tickets, and walked into the Fairgrounds Arena. We didn’t bother anybody. In fact, we talked to the fans and I signed autographs.

While I was signing somebody’s photo book, I looked up to see Nick peeking around the partition that covered the entrance to the wrestlers’ dressing room. When he saw me look over at him, he quickly pulled his head back around. A few minutes later, one of the cops walked over and asked if we had tickets. "Yes, sir. We sure do."

"Okay."

I’m sure Nick put him up to it. They couldn’t do anything, though, because we weren’t causing any trouble.

Birdie and I didn’t know what we were going to do. We didn’t have any money and I didn’t have a job. To make matters worse, we had more responsibility than we normally would have had. In May 1979, my sister had come down to visit us, and Birdie and I were taking care of her children.

One morning while we were fixing breakfast, we heard a pounding on our front door. Nobody was there when I opened it, but a package was sitting on the porch step. I picked it up and shook it to see if I could figure out what was in it. Birdie said, "Good god, Fargo! Don’t shake that. What’s the matter with you? It could be a bomb or something."

I was carefree and didn’t think about things like that. I set it on the dining-room table and went on doing whatever it was I had been doing. I thought about that package all morning, though, and it bothered me to know it was sitting there unopened. When I told Birdie I was going to open it, she freaked out. "Don’t open it!"

I didn’t listen. I sliced the tape that held the lid shut and opened the flaps. Inside was a bag full of marijuana. I said, "Good god! Is it Christmas? Who the hell would have sent me this?" As strange as it may sound, my next

thought was, "What am I gonna do with all this shit? It’ll take me forever to smoke it all."

Birdie told me to take it somewhere and throw it away. I wasn’t sure just what to do, so I dropped it underneath the kitchen table until I could decide. About mid-afternoon, I was standing in the kitchen with Birdie, my daughter’s kids, and our next-door neighbors, who were there for a barbeque we had planned. All of a sudden, our doorbell rang, someone yelled out something, and the front door crashed open. Four cops rushed into room, screaming and yelling, with guns in their hands. "Down on the floor! On the floor!"

They ushered Birdie and me outside and made us stand with our hands behind our heads. After a few minutes, one of the cops came outside with the package in his hand and asked, "What’s this?"

"Someone left it on our porch this morning. I don’t know where it came from."

At that point, he read us our rights — not just me, but Birdie, as well — and handcuffed us. "What did we do?"

"You’re under arrest for possession of one pound of marijuana."

I thought it was curious he knew how much it weighed. They hadn’t taken any scales or electronic equipment into the house. "It ain’t mine."

"It’s in your possession."

A few minutes later, one of the cops came outside and asked, "Are you a member of the KKK?"

"Yes, sir. Is there anything wrong with that? Is it against the law?"

"No. You have guns in the house, too."

"What’s wrong with having guns? They’re all valuable antiques. Old guns."

He said, "We found a lot of Nazi stuff in your place, too, including a swastika patch."

I told him, "That’s just something bikers do. It don’t mean nothin’."

"Oh, you’re a biker, huh?"

"Yeah. Where are we goin’ with this?"

He went on and on about the war memorabilia I had. I loved collecting things from the war. I had Japanese and German helmets, flags, guns, knives, and swords. It didn’t mean anything. I was just a collector. I asked him, "Are you tellin’ me I can’t collect stuff that’s historical? If you’ll look, you’ll see I have George Washington’s picture on the wall, and Abraham Lincoln’s. You don’t see a picture of Hitler, do you?"

Then they carried out my guns. "Whoa! What’s goin’ on here?"

They said, "We’re confiscating these."

I said, "Why? What the hell did they do? They were just hangin’ on the wall."

"Well, we’ve gotta take ‘em."

They packed it all up and put the boxes in the trunk of their cars. They took all my antique guns, all my KKK memorabilia, and left us standing there. As they got into their cars, I asked, "Hey, what about us? You gonna take us to jail?"

"Don’t worry. We’ll be back for you. Don’t go anywhere."

It was embarrassing because all the people living in the apartments had come out to see what was going on. When the police were gone, we went back inside the apartment and I called some of my friends. One of them said, "I don’t know what to tell you, but if you wanna get out of the apartment, come stay at our house."

Birdie and I packed up what we could carry and walked to my friend's house. Now and then, he'd call the police to see if there were any warrants out for our arrest, only to be told there weren't. After a couple of weeks went by, he was told, "Yes, there is." My friend said, "You guys better get out of town."

My friend helped us get a car and we drove to Pensacola. I was really paranoid. I cut my hair short and dyed it black. I don't know what I was thinking because I went back to work for Lee Fields and wrestled as … Don Fargo!

I never knew who set us up. I assumed it was Gulas, but that's a bit hard for me to believe because he didn't know the difference between marijuana and dried parsley.

While we were living in Pensacola, the owner of a motel in Pensacola called to see if I would be interested in painting some murals on the walls. I had painted a mural there years before and the guy really liked it. When Birdie and I showed up, he asked me if I would be interested in running the motel. I didn't have any other options at the time, so I was happy to take him up on his offer. He paid me well and let us live in one of the rooms.

I had been painting murals for many years. When I wasn't able to wrestle because of an injury, or if I couldn't get booked, I would paint murals to earn enough money to live. That talent got Birdie and I through those lean years in Pensacola. I took one of the publicity pictures Scott Teal shot of me back in the '70s and made a business card out of it. I left them everywhere I went … bars, gyms, wrestling shows, restaurants, and grocery stores. People would call and invite me to their homes to paint murals on their walls. They would invite their friends over to see it and, in turn, those people would call to have me paint them in their homes. Hunters paid me to paint hunting scenes on the walls of their dens.

Today, when I look at some of those paintings and murals I created in Pensacola, I can't believe I did them. I painted one on the side of a pawn shop that was 30 yards long and 18 feet high. It was so big they had to build a scaffold for me. Twenty years ago, I painted a western scene with cowboys riding through town and shooting their guns, with the lawmen

standing on a porch waiting for them. A sign said "No Guns in Dodge." It’s still there. Those murals are my legacy. They look the same as the day I painted them. I’d like to think they’d be there 100 years from now so people will say, "Some guy named Don Fargo painted those."

I have a friend who goes by the name EZ. He’s one of the nicest people in the world and is happy all the time. We rode bikes together for many years. One day, when we went to the shop where he was building his dream bike, the owner of the shop asked me to paint a mural on the shop wall. Now, when I look at a wall, I don’t see a wall. I see a canvas. My mind immediately begins to think about what would look good on it.

EZ wears baggy, bib overalls, and a confederate hat. He has a grey beard and is stooped over. I remembered a cartoon I had seen of a confederate soldier with a big red nose, holding a sword, with a caption that said, "Forget hell!" I painted it as I remembered it and, when I finished, it looked exactly like EZ.

No sooner had I finished than the guy wanted another wall painted. I told him, "I’ll do it if you’ll finish EZ’s bike." The guy was one of the best mechanics around and I wanted him to take care of my friend. He agreed, so I went to work.

I always liked a painting I had seen of the cartoon character "Ghost Rider." In the cartoon, a biker is riding through the desert with beautiful mountains and hills in the distance. Ahead of him is Ghost Rider on a white horse. When I finished, it looked really cool, but I wanted to add my own special touch. In front of Ghost Rider, I painted a dog. When the shop owner saw it, he said, "You put a damn dog ahead of everybody!"

"Hell, yeah!"

I still paint murals, although I can’t reach up high because my shoulders are so messed up from Bob Kelly cranking on them in the ring … stiff son-of-a-bitch.

My favorite subject to paint is motorcycles. I know. That’s hard to believe. I also did oil paintings. Several years ago, I painted pictures of a mountain

man, a ninja, a cowboy, and a pirate on 24x20 canvases. When Lester Welch asked me how much I wanted for them, I said, "Give me twenty bucks."

He said, "I'll take all four."

Not too long after we settled in Pensacola, I was on my way to Mobile to wrestle. A cop pulled me over in Daphne [AL] and said he stopped me because my car had drifted a couple of times from one lane to the other. My eyes were swollen from shots I had taken the hard way, so I probably looked drunk. "Have you been drinking?"

I was honest. "Yes, sir, but just a little bit."

He said, "Well, I'm gonna have to take you in. You can't be driving after you've been drinking."

"I'm on my way to wrestle. I can't miss the show."

"We'll keep you for three or four hours until you sober up and then we'll release you. It's for your own good."

He took me to the city jail and threw me in the drunk tank.

The next day, a cop walked in and said, "We've gotta take you to the Bay Minette jail. You're wanted in Nashville."

I couldn't believe it. The jail in Bay Minette [AL] was a bad place. After I was there for about a week, they moved me to something they called the bullpen, which is where they kept all the bad-asses. I got depressed and quit doing anything. I didn't eat and I didn't exercise. I lost 17 pounds while I was there.

The big problem I had was getting word to Birdie so she knew where I was. When they transferred me to Bay Minette, I sat in a cell for two days before they let me call her. Shortly before all this took place, my brother sold my parents' house and sent my sister and me our shares, which came to $22,000 apiece. I told my wife to get a lawyer. He clipped me for a

thousand bucks and told me it would be best if I just pled guilty. I told him, "But I'm not guilty."

In the meantime, Birdie got in touch with a good lawyer in Tennessee. He got me out and Birdie and I drove up to Nashville to meet with him. He took my case, but asked for a retainer. To make a long story short, he said he'd take all my antique guns as my retainer. It took me a long time to collect them, but I wanted to get out of the mess I was in and put it behind me, so I agreed.

The following month, Fritz von Erich called and asked me to come back to Dallas. He made the usual promises of making me a lot of money, but I really wasn't surprised when that didn't happen. I did jobs (without complaint) for everybody in the territory. After a month, I skipped out on my bookings and began making calls to promoters. For the next twelve months, I wrestled for anyone who would use me.

In what was, perhaps, my last run of any length in one of the major territories, I went to Nashville to wrestle for Buddy Fuller, who had bought the Nashville territory from Nick Gulas. Once again, I went in as a babyface and spent most of the run teaming with either Robert Gibson or Dick Steinborn. When Jerry Jarrett took over the Nashville end of the territory and combined it with his Memphis promotion, I worked for him through the end of November.

At the time, I didn't know it, but Birdie had decided enough was enough and had filed for divorce. To add insult to injury, I later learned she had left me for another man. I went to pieces. I couldn't believe it. Granted, she was a lot younger than I was, but I didn't have any idea she wasn't happy with me. Like Joanne who preceded her, I think Birdie saw the handwriting on the wall and realized there was no future with me. She treated me really well, but I was on the road all the time. I didn't see my children very often because I didn't want to mess them up. I don't want to sound like I never thought about my kids or my wife when I was gone, because I did. I thought about them all the time when I was on the road, but I was wild and crazy and I didn't want to influence them in a bad way.

I really can’t say anything bad about Birdie. She was a good woman in all respects. Unfortunately, broken marriages are very common in the wrestling business. We’re on the road all the time and the wives are left at home. I don’t blame her for doing what she did. I didn’t understand it at the time and I was devastated, but I eventually realized it was just part of the wrestling game. Looking back on it, she left me just like she left Frank. It just proves the old saying, "What goes around comes around."

Birdie’s family all lived in Pensacola and they liked me. I care for them, too. They were always good to me. In fact, even after she left, her nephews and nieces continued to call me Uncle Donnie. Her mother comes to Pensacola now and then to visit her granddaughter and we all get together for dinner.

I contacted Birdie many times in an attempt to get back together, but she wasn’t interested. Later on, when I went back to Amarillo, we became friends. It was a real soap opera (The Young and the Wrestlers?) because Birdie and Joanne (my first wife) became good friends after she left me.

I came to realize that Birdie had been led down the wrong path by a con artist. She didn’t stay with the guy she left me for. They got divorced and she moved to Houston. A few years later, I went to visit my son. On the way there, I stopped in Houston to see how Birdie was doing. She was still divorced, but doing well. I left the next day and we stayed in touch. The next thing I knew, she had remarried the guy, and the next time I stopped by to see her, he was living with her.

Birdie had a child with the other guy and, when she was only 36 years old, died of a brain aneurism. She was in a coma for awhile before she died. I wanted to go see her, but her family said she was in a fetal position and it would be better if I just remembered her as she had been.

My lawyer kept me on the street until June 1981, which was when we went to trial on the drug possession charges. By the end of the trial, all my dad’s money was gone and I was found guilty of possession of one pound of marijuana and trafficking. The judge sentenced me to several years in prison, but my lawyer pulled some strings and got a suspended sentence with one-year probation. Since my kids were in Amarillo, I asked the judge

if I could serve my sentence there. He agreed and I left a few days after the trial.

One of the things I learned through all this was how incompetent our newspaper reporters are. The article published in the Nashville Tennessean said drugs, two pounds of marijuana, and 30 marijuana plants were found during the search of my house. Nothing could have been further from the truth, as court documents showed.

The first thing I did in Amarillo was to report to my probation officer. When I walked in, he looked at me and said, "I know you. Didn't you wrestle? You're Don Fargo!"

I said, "Yeah."

He said, "I used to go watch you, man. You guys were great!"

He was a really nice man. We talked for a few minutes about wrestling before he said, "So, you've been a naughty boy."

I said, "Well, not really."

"Oh, yeah. I hear that all the time."

"Well, this one's the truth."

He listened to my story and said, "Wow! That's a good one … if it's true. I thought I had heard every story there was to tell, but this is a new one."

I made my scheduled reports just a few times before he said, "Listen, Don. You know you're supposed to report to me three times a week. I'm gonna make it easy on ya. You don't have to report to me all the time. If you plan to go somewhere outside the city limits, let me know." He was very considerate and worked things out so I was granted an early probation.

The wrestling business in Amarillo wasn't great, but it was a place to work, and that was all the therapy I really needed. From June through October 1981, I wrestled every week against people like Ricky Romero, Ricky Youngblood, Tom Jones, and Chief Frank Hill.

During the ten months I was in Amarillo, I really ramped up my use of drugs and alcohol. I was devastated over Birdie leaving me and I just couldn’t get over it. In October 1981, I got so wasted one night that I tore up my apartment and was on the verge of committing suicide. It was so bad that I called my son, Ronnie, to see if he would stay with me to be sure I didn’t hurt myself. Ronnie lived in Lubbock at the time. When he got there, the front door was standing wide open and I was lying on the floor, dead drunk. That night, I slept on the floor while my son sat in a chair and watched over me.

The next morning, Ricky Romero showed up … out of the blue. He didn’t know I was having problems, but he told me, "For some reason, I thought I should come over to see you." When he saw my apartment, he said, "Damn, man! What’s going on here? What happened?"

When my son explained to Ricky about the bad times I was having, he said, "Man, you’ve gotta get back on your feet. I’ve got a job for you." I didn’t know what Ricky was talking about. He said, "I’m gonna talk to LeRoy McGuirk to see if he’ll use you."

I told him, "I don’t think McGuirk wants me."

He said, "He will … because I’m the booker, and I want you. LeRoy is promoting shows in Oklahoma again."

I said, "Fuck the world. I’ve got nothin’ to live for."

He said, "Get yourself together. I want you to come work with me. We’ll have good matches together. I’ll take care of you."

My son convinced me to do it, so we got into Ricky’s Firebird and he took me to the motel where he lived. He let me live in the room with him (probably so he could keep an eye on me), got me sobered up, bought me a couple of good meals, and took me to Alcoholics Anonymous. He also took me to see his minister. I didn’t think about it until my editor and I reached this point in the book, but what Ricky was doing for me was exactly what I had done for Billy Hines a few years before.

McGuirk had promoted wrestling in Oklahoma since the 1950s, but it wasn't the thriving territory it once had been. With the wrestling business in the toilet, McGuirk wanted to do something to get the territory going again, so he got rid of Leo Voss and gave Ricky the book. Ricky did one hell of a job for him. He was promoting shows in Tulsa and Oklahoma City, and in Missouri, he was holding cards in Springfield and Joplin. He brought in Porkchop Cash, Chief Frank Hill, Eric Embry, Don Bass, and Tom Jones.

I don't remember what got LeRoy so upset one day, but Ricky told us LeRoy wanted to see us all in the office. LeRoy's office was pretty small, so we were packed in there like sardines. After we all got in there, we stood there waiting for LeRoy to say something. It was really strange because he just sat at his desk, facing us. LeRoy was blind, but it was like he was looking straight at us, or thinking about something. All of a sudden, he said, "I've had enough of this fucking bullshit." He reached in the front drawer of his desk, pulled out a gun, shouted, "I'll show you, you son-of-a-bitch," and began waving the gun around. Everybody either hit the floor or ran for the hills. That room cleared out so fast. Ten guys were pushing and shoving each other. Everybody wanted to be the first one out the door. I can't think of anything more dangerous than a blind man wielding a loaded weapon. I never knew what it was all about. I asked Ricky Romero, but he didn't know any more than I did.

While I was in Oklahoma, I ran into a girl I had met when Jim Dalton and I were there in 1965. She had been a teenager then. When I saw her in '81, she was quite the looker. One night, I had four midgets with me and I couldn't get my car started after the matches. She told me we were welcome to stay at her house. God, it was like having four children. Those little sons-of-bitches were climbing maniacs. They walked on the counters and looked through the cupboards. They rummaged through her refrigerator. The next thing I know, they were asking me if I thought the woman would have sex with them. I couldn't believe it. I said, "Goddam! Leave her alone. She's a friend." They drove us crazy.

I can't say enough good things about Ricky Romero. He had a lot of stroke in Amarillo and he helped me out a lot, and when I was really in need, he got me back on the right path. I'll always be grateful to him for that.

Even years before that, whenever I went to Amarillo, Ricky asked for a match with me, especially on TV, because he knew damn well I would let him do what he wanted to do and make him look good in the process. In fact, when the WWF came into Amarillo, they used some of the local talent, including Ricky. Ricky talked to the promoter and had him change the card so he could work with me.

My run in Oklahoma only lasted a little more than a month. Ricky did his best to get that territory up again, but it was bad.

In less than a week, I was depressed again and I really sank down to an all-time low. I wouldn't even go to my motel room. I'd sit behind the Waffle House by the dumpster and drink my booze. There I was, a big wrestling star, on skid row. One of the waitresses came out one morning and said, "You're Don Fargo, aren't you?"

"Yeah."

She said, "My name's Ruth. What are you doing out here?"

I told her I was depressed and shared my story with her. Ruth took me into the restaurant and into the bathroom, where she cleaned me up, and then got me a good meal. When her shift was over, she took me to her place and let me stay there. She took good care of me. That's when I began to get back onto my feet again.

The next day, before we went back to the motel where I was living, Ruth took me to see a photographer I knew. I wanted to let the wrestling promoters know there wasn't anything they could do to discourage me. In the studio, I stripped off all my clothes, put a title belt around my waist and a bandana around my head, got my pecker hard, and had my picture taken. I sent a copy to every promoter I didn't like.

Shortly after that, I met a guy named Bob Owens, who said he knew a guy who was promoting wrestling in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and he was pretty sure he could get the guy to use me on his cards. He was running Tuscaloosa and one other town. Since I didn't have any other options, I

went along with him. What he didn’t tell me was that the guy was using young, green kids who knew nothing about old-school wrestling.

Fortunately, one of the best things that ever happened to me came about as a result of me going to Tuscaloosa. That was when I met Fannie Margaret Earnest.

One night in late ‘81, when I was wrestling in Cottondale, a small town about ten miles southeast of Tuscaloosa, I met a girl named Louise who took a fancy to me. She was really nice. I had a ride home after the matches, but she told me she’d like to take me back to Tuscaloosa, even though she lived there in Cottondale. We had a great time talking during the trip. I told her about my problems. I even told her about my wife, Birdie, because I still carried a torch for her. Louise ended up spending the night with me. I talked practically the whole night long, to a point where I’m sure she probably was wishing I’d shut up. I told her, "I’m looking for a nice country girl to settle down with. Do you know anybody like that?"

She said, "I know a lot of nice girls. I’ll bring them over tomorrow if that’s okay with you."

The next day, just as I stepped out of the shower, I heard a knock on my door. I opened the door wearing nothing but a towel. At the time, I had a crew cut, a six-pack, and I was down to about 198 pounds. I had a little moustache, but I had shaved off my beard and my hair was cut short. I looked good. When I opened the door, I saw Louise standing there with four other girls. Their eyes immediately dropped to look at my abs … or, at least, I think that’s what they were looking at. What I didn’t know at the time was, Louise had shown them the photo I sent to the promoters when I was in Oklahoma. She told me they all wanted to meet me after they saw the picture. They came in and I looked at all four girls, but my attention immediately was focused on one particular girl:

Margie. To be more accurate, Fannie Margaret Earnest.

I fell in love right there on the spot. The instant I heard her speak, I knew she was a Southern girl, which was what I liked. She was quiet and just sat there while we all smoked a little pot and got acquainted.

When we managed to get off to ourselves for a few minutes, we sat there together and talked about everything that came to our minds. I told her how lonely I was. Eventually, I asked her if she would spend the night. I didn't want to have sex. I just wanted her there with me. And that's exactly what happened.

She left early the next morning, but not before I got her telephone number. Her telephone must have been ringing when she walked into her apartment because I called at least 20 times in the next hour. When I told her I'd like to see her again, she showed up a few hours later and we talked about everything we didn't talk about the night before. Later that night, we went to dinner, to see a movie, and … well, I'll leave the rest to your imagination.

The next day, the owner of the motel told me I had to leave because the promoter who brought me there didn't pay the bill. I wasn't making enough from my bookings, so I went to the promoter and told him, "You've gotta pay the fuckin' bill." He did, but I had nowhere to go. When I told Margie the story, she asked me to move in with her.

If it wasn't for Margie, I don't think I'd be here today. She's taken good care of me for the past 32 years and has changed my whole life.

A week or so after I moved in, Margie took me to her childhood home in Cottondale to meet her parents. They weren't happy to see me with her because they were wrestling fans. They had seen me wrestle many times and they hated me. They were dead set against Margie and me being together. In fact, Margie told me she had watched wrestling when she was a little girl and she hated me, as well. When we got married at the end of 1982, we moved into Margie's dad's garage in Cottondale. I liked Margie's dad. He was a good man. He was just caught up in the good-guy, bad-guy scenario of professional wrestling … and I just happened to be the bad guy.

When we met, Margie was working at a Mexican restaurant in Tuscaloosa, and I wrestled as often as I could find work, but the territories, along with the money, were rapidly disappearing. One day, I got a phone call from Ruth, the girl in Oklahoma who had helped me out. Somehow, she found

out where I was and wanted to know if she could come up and stay with us. I told her it would be fine.

I don’t know what Margie saw in me, but she really took care of me. When I told her how much I liked motorcycles, she said, "Let’s go down to the motorcycle shop and look at the Harleys." She had much more on her mind than looking, though. When she saw the gleam in my eye when I spotted one certain bike, she called the salesman over and told him she wanted to buy it. A week or two later, I just happened to mention the fact that we had to find a car, as well. She went out that day and bought a used Cadillac. She got a really good deal on it. It was one nice car. It was green with a black interior and wide, whitewall tires. It looked like a pimp car.

Wrestling was pretty much dead in Alabama at that time, so I told Margie I wanted to go to Amarillo. Margie was a beautiful girl and she had one hell of a body, so I wanted to show her off to my ex-wives. I wanted them to see that I was happy.

Before we went to Amarillo, though, I wanted to visit my old partner Mike Diamond in Oklahoma City. Mike was working as a bouncer at a bar and his old lady worked in the bar as a titty dancer.

Just like everything else I did with my life, I didn’t take time to think things through. I had a new bike and I just had to ride it to Oklahoma City … in the dead of winter. I was hardcore, though. Cold weather wasn’t anything I couldn’t handle. I climbed onto the bike and followed Margie and Ruth. We weren’t more than an hour out before the cold really began to penetrate my bones. I could see Margie and Ruth through the rear window of the car. They were drinking booze, smoking, and having a great time, while I was freezing my balls off.

After we had driven about fifty miles, we stopped at a store so I could buy a jacket, but that just wasn’t enough to keep the icy wind from seeping through. We stopped again less than an hour later and bought thick tube socks. I thought they would help keep my legs warm. Shortly before sundown, we stopped at a motel in West Memphis, Arkansas, and I pushed the bike into the room. Those two girls both bear-hugged me in an attempt

to get me warm. I was shaking like hell. I took a 30-minute hot shower and then, totally exhausted, climbed into bed.

It was no warmer the next morning. I dreaded climbing onto that bike, but I didn't have any other choice. It was so cold that I wore a helmet the whole time, and I hate helmets. Texas didn't have a helmet law, so if it hadn't been for the cold, I would have left the helmet at the motel. It was snowing that day and the wind was blowing like hell. I had to get close behind the 18-wheelers so they would pull me along and block the wind and snow.

By the time we got into Little Rock, though, the temperature had really warmed up. The two girls decided it would be fun to ride behind me on the bike, so they flipped a coin to see who would get the privilege. Margie lost, so she had to drive the Cadillac, while Ruth climbed onto the seat behind me. That sort of pissed off Margie.

Since the weather was nice, I took the lead and headed down the road. Within minutes, Margie pulled up alongside us, held up a bottle of whiskey, took a good long chug, and grinned.

Just as we pulled into a small town about fifty miles east of Oklahoma City, my muffler fell off. I reverted back to my old-school days and used a coat hanger to hold it in place.

Somewhere along the way, Ruth decided she wanted to return to her home in Oklahoma, so she left to find a ride. Margie and I continued on our way and soon arrived in Oklahoma City. We found a pay phone and I called Mike to let him know we'd be stopping by. "Hey, Mike. I'm passing through. I got me a bike. I wanna come down and see ya."

He paused for a second before he said, "Yeah. Come on down to the club." But before I could hang up, he asked, "Wait a minute. Are you wearin' colors?"

When I told him I wasn't, he said, "Okay, come on."

Wearing colors or patches identifies bikers as being members of a certain club or territory. They allow bikers to identify members of their own club or

territory and those who don’t belong to their club. Bar owners don’t want them worn in bars because their use can occasionally lead to problems between rival clubs.

When we got there, I told Margie to wait in the car while I went in to see him. Mike and I began talking and drinking beer, and before I knew it, an hour had passed. All of a sudden, it dawned on me. "Oh, god! My wife is out in the car. I gotta go get her. Hey, we’re broke as hell. Can we stay the night with you?"

"Can she dance?" he asked.

That took me by surprise. I’m hardly ever at a loss for words, but I couldn’t think of what to say. "Uh … she’s a country girl. I don’t think … I don’t know … uh, I’ll go ask her."

I went out and said, "Margie, come on in. Do you think you could dance for me?"

She didn’t realize what I was asking. She thought I meant regular dancing. "I can slow dance for you."

I wasn’t quite sure how to explain, so I simply said, "Let’s go inside and talk to Mike."

The place was really crowded. Margie’s eyes opened wide when she saw the naked girls dancing. Mike walked over, introduced himself, and asked, "Would you like to dance?"

"I’ve never done that before, but I suppose I could try."

I said, "Look, Margie. Don’t take your clothes off. Just go out there and dance. The imagination is better than anything." She didn’t move too well at first, but it didn’t take long for her to get the feel for it.

When she finished the dance, she began to walk over to where I was sitting, but before she reached me, a guy stepped up and whispered something to her. She shrugged her shoulders and said something back, and then walked

over to our table. "The guy over there wants me to sit at his table. He said he'd pay me eighty dollars just to sit and talk with him."

I said, "Go ahead. I'll keep an eye on him in case he gets any ideas."

She walked back to where the guy was sitting and sat down beside him. I didn't think the guy was ever going to stop talking. He talked and talked and talked. Margie didn't say much of anything. She just listened and nodded her head. When she came back to my table, she was excited. "Look at the money I made, Fargo!"

That's how Margie got started in the stripping business. She wasn't your typical stripper, though. She danced with class. She told club owners she would wear sexy clothes and strip down to her panties, but no further. I thought that was smart because guys get more excited by what they imagine than by what they actually see.

Margie and I stayed with Mike overnight and then went on to Amarillo. I took Margie to a bar called Whiskey River and she got a job dancing. One night shortly after she started working there, the front door slammed open and cops came in with dogs. Everybody in that bar ran to the bathroom to flush their stuff down the toilet. I was sitting at a table while Margie was on stage. One of the cops pointed at me and they all headed in my direction. The cop asked me, "Is that your bike outside?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it's a stolen bike."

I said, "No, it's not."

"Yes, it is. Come outside with me."

As soon as I walked outside, they grabbed me and, before I knew it, I was handcuffed. "You're under arrest for having a stolen motorcycle."

Margie came out and yelled, "What in the hell are you doing? He hasn't done anything wrong."

One of Margie’s sugar daddies was an attorney. "Get your friend, Margie," I said. "They’re sayin’ my bike is stolen."

Margie lit into them. "You cops are full of shit."

"Watch your language, lady, or I’ll haul you downtown with your friend here."

They hustled me into the police car and took me to the police station. They took me into the interrogation room and said they knew the bike was stolen. When I asked them why they thought that, they said it didn’t have a license plate. They asked me a thousand questions and harassed me for a couple of hours before they released me and took me back to the bar.

When they let me out, I saw a guy sitting in his car. He hollered at me, "Hey, I wanna talk to you."

I thought, "Oh, no. Now what."

He said, "Brother, I was sitting there and saw the whole thing. The cops took the plates off your bike."

I don’t know why they targeted me, but I’m sure it was because I was both a biker and a newcomer. They thought I would be a trouble-maker, so they figured they would harass me and possibly convince me to leave town.

After we had been there for a few weeks, I ran into Birdie in downtown Amarillo. I invited her to the club because I wanted her to see Margie. Boy, when she saw her dancing, her face dropped. She recovered quickly and nonchalantly said, "Oh, I can do that." When I introduced them, they were very cordial to each other and even seemed to hit it off. As it turned out, the three of us became good friends and we visited Birdie and her old man in Houston now and then.

Margie left Whiskey River after a year and went to work at a "Gentleman’s Club" called the Crystal Pistol. They hired her on the spot. That place was a hangout for rednecks, hippies, and bikers, and was considered to be the roughest bar in Amarillo. Margie danced and built up a whole clientele of

sugar daddies who would come in to watch her dance, or just talk to her. I collected the money and acted as her bodyguard. It was a rough place. Fights broke out all the time and people got robbed regularly, so I wanted to be sure she didn't get hurt. When the bar closed, the guys who wanted to party with her would wait out front. We'd sneak out the back door and ride home on my motorcycle.

One of the guys liked her so much he bought her a car. She asked me one day, "He wants to take me out to lunch and buy me some clothes. What do you think?"

"I don't care. Go ahead."

My daughter was standing there with me when this took place. "Dad, you're letting her go out with another man?"

I told her, "Honey, let me tell you something. That's called trust." And I did trust her. They weren't gone too long. He took her out to lunch and she came back with an armload of nice clothes. The guy came back to see her all the time.

It was a crooked business, but it was what we had to do to survive. The only reason the girls would go out with one of the customers would be to get something. They wouldn't have sex with the customers because most of them were married, although I'm sure there were girls who did.

Their best customers sat in what we called "perverts' row." They were the guys who sat as close to the dancers as they were allowed so they could either hand money to the girls or put bills into their underwear. One of the guys who sat in perverts' row was married to one of the dancers. At the end of the night, she'd give him all the money she made … and he'd go to another strip joint and give it to the other girls. She eventually caught him doing that and left him.

On October 21, 1982, Margie and I got married at Tyler Street Tavern, a biker bar in Amarillo. We called both Joanne and Birdie — my two ex-wives — to tell them we were getting married and having a big party at the bar. They both showed up for the ceremony. Joanne brought our daughter,

Lynda, with her. Lynda had her baby with her. They were kind of dumbfounded when they walked into the bar and saw what was going on. The people were acting just like they did on any other night of the week, including the girls, who were walking around topless.

We were married by a biker who had a Justice of the Peace license. A few minutes before the wedding ceremony began, somebody yelled, "We don’t have no flowers." A few minutes later, somebody walked in with an armload of flower sprays … which they had procured from the cemetery across the street. Our marriage vows were taken from the Manual of the Bike and included lines like "Will this rotor take this piston" and "We promise to ride together forever." Lots of bikers get married like that. I have to admit that it got a little bit crazy.

Margie was making good money in the clubs, so we didn’t have any problem paying our bills, but I really wanted to get back into the ring. The problem was, I couldn’t get booked to wrestle anywhere. I had been fired so many times, by so many promoters, that nobody would use me. I had pretty much worn out my welcome everywhere and was persona non grata.

Chapter 24
The Knucklehead Saloon

As much as I like Ricky Romero, I have to tell the story of how he almost got me killed when he got me booked in Mexico. Ricky said, "Fargo, I got something for you. You come to Mexico with me and you'll do good."

I agreed to go and, on the first night, which was Juárez, the arena was packed with rabid, screaming Mexican wrestling fans. When we walked into the dressing room, everybody was speaking Spanish. I was the only white man there. The promoter, who ran the jail and had a lot of influence with the police department, brought in a newspaper reporter to interview me. Before they did the interview, they took a picture of me with my arms folded. I weighed 260 pounds at the time and I was a mean-looking son-of-a-bitch.

Since I didn't speak Spanish, the promoter brought in a Mexican to "talk for me." They talked back and forth for several minutes. I didn't have a clue as to what they were saying, but the announcer kept looking over at me with a shocked expression on his face. When they finished, I asked Ricky what they had said. He said, "Oh, man. He put you over great!"

"Well, what the fuck did he say?"

"He said your name is Killer Fargo. You got the name because you had been in one of the roughest prisons in Mexico. Just when they were ready to hang you, you beat up the cops, killed the warden, jumped over the wall, swam through a shark-infested moat, and escaped."

"What? The people are going to believe this! What if some rogue cop believes it and tries to arrest me and take me back?"

"Because the police captain is the promoter in this area."

The next day, a story was printed in the newspaper about my "prison escape" and featured the picture of me with the words "Killer Fargo" as the caption. Ricky said, "You have to make the people believe you're crazy and dangerous."

My first thought was that I wasn't quite sure how to do that, but I immediately thought about Mad Dog Vachon [Maurice Vachon]. All I had to do was copy him. Before I walked out the door to go to the ring, I asked Ricky, "Do you have protection out there?"

"Oh, yeah. They're right over there," and he pointed to one side of the door. I looked out to see four moustachioed men with guns sticking out from their waistbands, and wearing sombreros pulled down low over their eyes and cocked to the side. "Holy fuck," were the only words I could think of that fit the situation.

I had taken no more than three steps into the arena when I heard a loud CRA-ASH! as a chair landed on the floor beside me. Someone had tossed it down from the balcony. I had never been to that arena, I hadn't done anything, either outside or inside the ring, and the fans knew next to nothing about me … and they were already intent on killing me.

I did the only thing I knew of to do. I turned into Mad Dog Vachon. I jumped up and down, all the way to the ring, acting like I was possessed by a demon. When the people in the aisle and in the outside row of ringside chairs saw me coming, they turned around and ran over each other in their haste to get away. I was supposed to beat my opponent in a few seconds, so I ran over and pounded him to the mat. I honestly think he was as scared of me as the fans were. The look on his face was one of terror. I pinned him, scooted out of the ring, and high-tailed it for the dressing room.

For the next show, I cut my hair into a Mohawk and painted a swastika on my face. I don't know the reasoning behind it, but the promoters gave me a tag team partner. The look on his face when he saw the swastikas was one of absolute fear. He was a young kid and I'm sure he didn't know what to make of it. I told the kid, "Just follow me." We walked out into the arena and I took off, leaving him standing there. I ran across the arena and out into a hallway. I ran up the stairs and came out in the balcony, sending

people scattering in every direction. I ran all over that building. The people were screaming in fright. I ran down the aisle, dropped down to the floor from the balcony railing, and ran into the ring. We had our match and went back to the dressing room.

Margie and a bunch of my biker buddies went with me to that first show. On the way back, it was Margie, Ricky and me. As I drove up a hill in the salt flats, we all began to talk about how we needed to piss. When we reached the top, we all got out of the car. The car didn't have an emergency brake, so I figured I'd just leave it in gear. I had to piss so bad, though, that I jumped out without checking to be sure it was firmly in gear. All of a sudden, I heard my wife, "Fargo-ooooo!"

I turned to see the car slowly rolling backwards. Fortunately, we had crested the hill so we had stopped on a gentle slope. The three of us jumped behind the car and held it in place until Margie could get inside to put on the brake. If we hadn't stopped it, the car would have gone over the side of the mountain.

The next night, some people had been watching to see where I parked my car. They got into it and put marijuana roaches in the ashtray. When I got into my car and drove towards the gate, someone pulled up next to me and motioned for me to pull over. I said, "Fuck you, man." He pulled out a gun and pointed it at me.

I pulled over.

He got out of his car and said something in Spanish. I could tell from his body language that he was telling me to do something, but I didn't know what he was saying. When he tapped on the trunk of my car, I realized he wanted to look inside. I tried to tell him I didn't have anything in there other than my wrestling gear. I kept trying to tell him I was a wrestler. I pointed at myself and said "Lucha," which was the only Spanish word I knew. He looked through my wrestling bag and seemed to be satisfied with what he saw.

Then he decided to look inside the car. Sure enough, he found the marijuana roaches. He didn't seem to be surprised to find them. In fact, if anybody

was surprised, it was me. I knew what he meant when he made a circular motion with his forefinger. He was going to arrest me and put me in handcuffs. Before he could get any further, another car screeched to a halt beside us and the driver began a rapid exchange with the guy who was going to arrest me. He turned, looked me in the eye, and shook his head. He got back into his car and they both left.

I stood there for a minute or two after they were gone, still not quite sure what to make of what had happened. When I went back into the arena to tell Ricky Romero about it, he laughed out loud and said, "Fargo, they weren't looking for the roaches. Someone escaped from jail and had guns in his car, and your car matched the description of the car they were looking for."

Those bastards couldn't have picked a worse time to plant those roaches in my car, but the urgency to find the escaped convict took precedence over arresting me for possession of marijuana. Ricky told me they might still come back to arrest me for the marijuana and offered to accompany me to the police station so we could straighten it out with the chief of police. I followed Ricky through a Mexican town where poverty was the name of the game and he talked to the police chief on my behalf. Ricky reminded me of that story every time I saw him after that.

Things looked bleak for us in 1983. I picked up a few wrestling bookings in Pensacola, but that was about it. Our only income came from Margie's dancing gigs and we didn't have a place to live. One day, a friend took Margie and me to meet an old Italian woman who owned a building, quite a bit of land, and several house trailers out on Dumas Highway. She told us we could live in one of the trailers in return for $300 a month and taking care of the property. I had noticed the building on her property looked abandoned and neglected. When I asked if we could convert the building into a bar, she agreed to let us use it until we could save up enough money to buy it. That was a dream come true for me, so we accepted her offer.

Margie and I spent the night in the bar and we were awake most of the night, talking about the things we wanted to do with it. We were so excited. The next day we moved into one of the trailers and, for the next few weeks, spent every minute of every day cleaning, making repairs, and doing whatever needed to be done.

I wanted to turn the building into a biker bar, so I told my friends to spread the word to all the bikers in the area. I called it the City Limits Bar because it was just outside the city limits. It was a good location because the police were always hassling bikers in the city limits. I fenced everything in and built a gate with a booth so we could charge people to come into the bar and have some control over who was allowed to come in.

The word spread quickly. Bikers came to the bar to drink and help me with projects I didn't have the knowledge or expertise to do. Some of the bikers were brick masons, so I asked them to help me build a barbeque pit. They build a pit as large as a king-size bed and created a grill to cover the top. The wife of one of the bikers worked at a meat-packing company and talked the owners into letting me buy beef ribs at wholesale prices.

I ran the bar, took care of the grounds, cut the grass, took care of maintenance on the trailers, collected the rent from the people who lived in the trailers, and did everything else that needed to be done.

The owner had three sons, two of whom lived on the property (and gave me a hard time). The third son (the brother with brains) lived in New York. We had a party at the bar one night and 300 people showed up. The brother from New York was there and was impressed by what he saw. He liked me because I took care of, not only the property, but his mother. She was getting frail and I did a lot to help her. Before he left, he paid a visit to his brothers and kicked them out of their trailers. They were worthless and took up space they could have been renting out.

We made money, but after a year or so, the lady decided she wanted to sell the property. Her son had raised our rent to $500, but that was still a good deal because that included the business. We kept every penny we made from the venture. Finally, a guy I knew, a wannabe biker who worked as a longshoreman, said he'd buy the property, but only if I agreed to stay and run the business. I accepted his offer and we continued doing what we had been doing.

As the saying goes, all good things must come to an end. A month or so after he bought the bar, he decided to quit paying the bills and shut it down.

When we lost the City Limits, Al Lovelock's widow asked me to run the back end of her bar. When Al died, she opened a bar in another location. She told me I could do anything I wanted with the back end, but she also wanted me to cook food for the customers who came in the front. It shouldn't come as any surprise that I turned it into a biker bar. I fixed up the back patio and began to feed and take care of the bikers. As word got around, they came out in droves. Of course, the other customers stopped coming because they were scared of the bikers. The bikers packed the place, though, so Lovelock's widow didn't care. She made a lot of money with that bar. She was just like her old man, Al Lovelock. She was a hustler.

The City Limits Bar was shut down for a long time. One day, a Vietnam veteran I knew said he knew somebody who wanted me to reopen the bar. When I told him I didn't know if the city would allow me to open it under my name, he told me to get a business license and liquor license in Margie's name. The guy gave me a credit line of $10,000 to use to get up and running again.

The first thing I did when I took over the bar was paint a picture of a Knucklehead motorcycle engine on a big piece of paneling, along with the words "Knucklehead Saloon," and hang it over the front door. I got rid of the old wooden chairs and barstools and bought couches and padded chairs. I bought a pool table and had the dance floor refinished. We set up an indoor grill and installed the kitchen equipment we needed to prepare and serve food. We even had a tattoo parlor set up inside the building.

I bought about 300 old Playboy magazines, scattered them throughout the bar, and pasted pictures of naked women all over the mens' bathroom walls. The broads were mad when they heard about that … not because they didn't want their men to be looking at pictures of naked women, but because I didn't hang pictures of naked men in their bathroom. I was an equal-opportunity kind of guy, so I had one of the girls go to the sex store and buy copies of Playgirl and other magazines that featured naked men. I cut out the photos and plastered them on the walls of the ladies' bathroom.

My mind was always working to come up with new ideas. When I finished the bathroom makeover, I painted a sign that said, "All women who pass through this door must take off their bras and panties and hang them from

the ceiling." I did it as a joke, but within a week, the ceiling was covered with bras and panties I stapled to the ceiling. One of the girls was menstruating and hung up her panties with blood on them. The ceiling became the talk of the town and drew in a lot of business. The college girls from West Texas State came to the bar just to see that. There were times when we had more than 200 people in that building and the streets and sidewalks were filled with motorcycles and pickup trucks.

One weekend, I decided to have an "All you can eat and drink for ten bucks" bash. Of course, "all you can drink" was draft beer, so most of the people would forgo that and buy the brand they liked. Even then, I only charged 75-cents a bottle, but I still made a few bucks on the promotion.

The place was packed all the time. I had three bandstands and booked live bands to play rock ‘n’ roll music every Friday and Saturday night. I used local bands who were willing to play for tips and beer. They knew all the college kids would be there and they would get a lot of exposure from the gig. I hired titty dancers to keep the crowd entertained. I practically gave away the chili. I only charged a quarter a bowl, but I spiced it up so people would be forced to buy drinks to quench their thirst. Of course, that backfired on me when I gave away free draft beer.

I didn’t have any kind of financial system set up to keep track of what came in and what went out. Every dollar that came in went into a cigar box, and expenses were taken from that same box. I didn’t get paid, but I was living like a king. I had a free place to live and hang out with people who were like me. My only expense was $500 a month rent.

We rented out trailers for just $25 a week. They were located just a short walk from the bar, towards the highway at the bottom of a field. I had a camping area where the bikers could pitch tents. Most of the time, we had nine or ten tents there. I didn’t charge anyone to sleep in the camping area, and I let some people sleep in the bar itself.

The bar stayed open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We had people sleeping on couches and on the floor in the building every night. I came into the bar once in awhile at three in the morning and people would still be dancing, playing pool, and even screwing on one of the couches. Nobody

cared that other people were in the room. I can’t begin to tell you the number of times we’d all pull up chairs and sit down to watch a couple screwing. I could have sold tickets. It was like a spectator sport.

When it was time for me to go home, I’d tell everybody, "We’re goin’ to bed. If you want a beer, help yourself. Just put the money in the cigar box." And they did. I really don’t think anybody cheated or stole from us. They respected me for what I was doing for everybody — giving them food, drinks, and a place to live — all at prices they couldn’t have found anywhere in the world. I didn’t care anything about making money. I just wanted to make enough to pay my rent and keep stocked up on food and drink. I was happy.

I let vendors set up booths to sell flags, buttons, and all kinds of biker apparel. I didn’t charge them a commission or rent for the space. I just wanted our biker friends to have a source where they could buy the things they wanted.

We never had any fights or trouble and we didn’t have one bit of trouble between groups or clubs. I did, however, have cameras mounted all over the inside of the building so I could keep an eye on things. I bought a big chair where I could sit and watch the monitors. Most of the time, I wore one of those butcher aprons. Of course, that was all I wore. I had more ass showing than the people in the hospitals who wear hospital gowns.

I only had one bad incident. I set up a poker run. A poker run is an event where the contestants ride their motorcycles to five designated places, where they would each draw a playing card. I would charge ten dollars to enter. I would tell everyone to drink as much beer as they wanted and then had each of them draw a card. I said, "Get on your bikes and go about 25 miles to (wherever it was) and you’ll see an old truck parked in front of the building. Stop there, drink some beer, tell them you’re on the poker run, and they’ll give you another card."

The people there gave them instructions on how to find the next stop, which might have been something like a truckstop, or another bar. They did that until they had five cards and then they headed back to the Knucklehead Saloon. It took several hours to make all the stops, so most of the players

were pretty drunk by the time they got back. A poker run isn’t a race. You do have to get to the finish within a certain time limit, but the object is to have the best poker hand at the end of the run. When they got back to the Knucklehead, which was the final stop, the person with the best poker hand won the prize. First prize was $300, second prize $150, and $75 for third. This was an example of why I didn’t make any money with the bar. I threw it away as fast as I made it. It didn’t matter, though. I was having fun and enjoying myself.

Unfortunately, the fun came to an end during one of those runs. One guy left with his pregnant wife on the back of his motorcycle. A short time later, another guy left with one of the local girls, who wanted to go with him because he was a safe driver and she trusted him.

There are a lot of rolling hills in Amarillo. During the run, someone had trouble with his bike, so the guy with the pregnant wife decided to turn around and go help. He was between hills in a dip, so he couldn’t see what was coming on the other side. As he drove up and over the hill, his bike collided with that of the guy with the local girl. When he realized what was about to happen, though, he reflexively pushed his wife off the bike before jumping off himself. They both suffered cuts and bruises, but otherwise landed safely. The other couple, however, was killed instantly.

I arrived right after it happened, but cars were already backed up on the road. I don’t know how they got there so fast, but a TV station van was trying to drive down the median to reach the accident. When I got past everyone, I saw the cops placing beer cans around the accident scene. My buddy and I both yelled at them, "Hey, hey! Hold on there! We don’t know where you got them, but those aren’t their beer cans."

"What do you mean? These are their beer cans."

"Oh, no they aren’t. Those two don’t even drink."

And they didn’t. Everybody knew that. I don’t know why the cops were putting the cans there, but I had a feeling they were trying to frame them. I told the cops and everybody else who would listen that the girl and the guy she was with did not drink. I even threatened the media, warning them that

if I heard anything at all on the news about the beer, I would sue them. As it turned out, the media still twisted the facts because they built up the poker run as a race, which it wasn’t.

I always helped people who came to me asking for help in some way or another. I didn’t care who it was. If they gave me a hard-luck story, I’d feed them and give them a beer. One day, two young kids showed up at my door and told me they needed a place to rest for an hour or two and something to eat. They had been on the road for some time and were dead tired. When they offered to do chores in return, I told them they could take out the trash, sweep the floor, and wipe down the bar.

I brought them two plates filled with beef ribs and told them to throw the bones wherever they wanted. Well, they took me up on my suggestion and threw them on the dance floor. I wasn’t worried because stray dogs came in and out of my bar all the time. They would pick up the bones and run off to eat them. The two boys hung around for awhile before telling us they had to leave.

About five or six days later, I was sitting out on the porch with a bunch of bikers when the two kids pulled up in a car. They spun a story that I believed hook, line and sinker. "Our sister loaned us her car so we could drive out here. Her freezer broke and she needs to get rid of this meat. We thought you might like to buy some."

Of course, I was always grilling ribs and steaks for people, so I said I’d be interested in seeing what they had. An old-time biker friend, Old Dutch, said, "Yeah, I want to look at it, too." Everybody there followed us out to their car and bought some of the meat. I only bought a small portion of what they had, but I gave them $75 because I knew they needed the money.

About three or four in the morning, the front door of our trailer was kicked open by a SWAT team. They came in with guns drawn and shouting, "Nobody move! Nobody move!" Margie and I were in bed, naked, and our pit bulls were in bed with us. When they came in, my dogs jumped off the bed and ran out to confront the SWAT team. I heard one guy yell, "Get these dogs off or we’re gonna shoot ‘em."

My wife didn’t bother to put her clothes on. She jumped out of bed, ran out of the room, and screamed, "The hell you are!" The two of us grabbed the dogs and wrestled them back into the bedroom.

The cops hassled us for more than an hour. They made us sit in chairs while they tore my trailer apart. "What are you lookin’ for?" They wouldn’t answer me. "If you’ll just tell me what it is you’re lookin’ for, I’ll tell you where it’s at."

I think they had seen too many movies. They were really bad. They dumped everything we owned out onto the floor. Finally, they said, "Okay, now we’re gonna search the bar."

They hustled me out the front door and, when I looked out, I saw all the people who were living on my property. The cops had them lined up outside while they went through their trailers. They herded all of us into the bar and made us get down on our knees with our hands behind our backs while they searched the building. I asked them, "Hey, aren’t you the city police?"

They didn’t say anything at first, but when I kept asking, they said, "Don’t you worry about that. We need the keys to your jukeboxes. We want to look in there."

"There’s nothing in there but records. Listen, you need to call the owner if you want to get into those boxes. His phone number is in my wallet."

When the owner arrived and saw us on the ground, he said, "What did you do, Fargo?"

I told him I hadn’t done anything and that I didn’t know why they were there. When the cops opened up the jukeboxes, they found … nothing. Then I heard somebody call out, "Hey, you guys! Come here. You need to see this."

He was laughing about a dildo I had mounted on the wall of the girl’s bathroom. I had installed it beside the toilet to use as the toilet-paper holder. It was a super-sized dildo, so the head protruded from the end of the toilet paper.

The only thing the cops found was a glass cigar tube filled with a white powder in one of the trailers. The guy who owned it said it was just baby powder (which is exactly what it was). They said they were going to test it because they thought it was cocaine and they took the guy with them when they left.

After they had searched for another 15 minutes or so, I heard one of the bikers say, "This is bullshit. I'm not in Nam anymore. I'm gettin' up." He proceeded to stand up, and when he did, we all stood up.

When I was a kid, my dad gave me a Nazi flag he had taken as a war souvenir. I had it hanging on the wall. The cops made us stand in front of it and took our pictures, which they intended to give to the judge. They took pictures of the German helmets I had scattered around on shelves, the photos of naked women I had tacked to the walls, and of the tattoo parlor. They checked my refrigerator and took out all the meat. I didn't have very much and that seemed to piss them off, which told me the meat I had bought from the two kids probably was stolen. The cops eventually gave up and left, leaving us with the plainclothesmen. They knew they weren't within their jurisdiction because we were outside the city limits, so they couldn't do anything to us.

A few minutes after they left, the sheriff and several of his deputies showed up. They searched in all the same places the cops had. They didn't find anything, but they did find my shotgun, which I had bought for $50 from a guy who had been passing through and needed cash to get on down the road. It was legal, but when I bought it, I didn't check to see if it had serial numbers on it. One of the deputies walked over to me and said, "You're under arrest."

"What for?"

"It's illegal to remove the serial numbers from a weapon."

"I didn't take no numbers off that shotgun."

Another deputy brought it over and pointed out where the numbers had been filed off. "You can see they've been removed."

"Well, I didn’t do it. They must have been gone before I bought it."

They didn’t hear a word I said, or at least, they chose not to. It was all a setup. They didn’t like bikers. They took me to the police station and booked me. I had to call my lawyer and pay him $500 to get me out.

The Knucklehead had been a great place for everyone to hang out. We didn’t bother anybody. We just had fun and minded our own business. Even so, undercover cops came in all the time. I could always tell an undercover cop because there was always something not quite right about them — they wore their earring in the wrong ear, they wore brand-new bandanas, and other little things that pegged them as narcs. They never got anything on us, but they continued to hassle us, just because they didn’t like us.

Every biker bar in every town has the same problem. The cops think we’re all dopeheads, druggies, and alcoholics. Sure, some bikers are, just like there are druggies in every business, but they didn’t like us because we looked the part. We had swastikas tattooed on our bodies. Oh, they had a field day with me when they took pictures at the police station. I have a tattoo of a devil on my back. On my lower back, I have a drawing of a skeleton riding a Harley and giving you the finger. One of the cops said, "That’s evil. Why do you have that on your back?"

I said, "Because I’m religious. Don’t you know that everybody has the devil on their back?"

He didn’t like that. "Smart ass."

After all we went through, I only had to appear before a judge. I didn’t have a trial, a jury, or anything. The judge said, "I’m going to let you go, but I think it might be wise if you left Texas. If you choose to disregard my warning, if you ever come before me again, you’d better bring your toothbrush."

Margie and I packed up everything we owned and moved down to Florida. I didn’t have to, but I got scared. I wasn’t sure just how far the law might go to convict me of something. I didn’t go back to Texas for many years. I was

even scared to visit my kids. When we left, the owner shut down the Knucklehead and sold the property.

To be honest, I left for another reason, as well. The people in West Texas all knew me as a wrestler and I was always getting challenges from people who wanted to see how tough I was, or to prove how tough they were. I wanted to get away from that atmosphere.

Years later, Margie and I decided to go from Florida to Sturgis, South Dakota, for the annual motorcycle rally. We hopped on our Harley and began our trip. We did fine until we broke down just outside Amarillo. I was really scared because I was afraid of what the law might do if they knew we were there. We called my daughter, who lived in Amarillo, and we hid in her garage. We didn't have any money to get my bike fixed, so I told Margie I'd see if anyone was promoting wrestling. I could wrestle a few times and earn the money we needed. Margie said she could make more money faster by titty dancing then I could wrestling. She found a strip bar and, in just two nights, earned enough money for us to have the repairs done.

We left the next day, but only made it a few miles before disaster struck. It was a hot day, so I had taken off my t-shirt and put it into my back pocket. I was driving with an open clutch. The t-shirt fell down into the clutch and caused it to seize up, bringing us to a screeching halt. We almost flew off the bike, but Margie was smart enough to drop her feet to the ground and help me keep the bike upright. As we stood on the side of the road, a big group of bikers drove up. Two of them took us to their house, fed us, and gave us a place to stay until we figured out a way to get the bike fixed.

Once again, Margie came through. The girl who took us in got her a job titty dancing for three more nights. She made $600 and we were able to get the bike repaired.

I wrestled a few times while I was running the bars. Verne Gagne was taping his television show in Las Vegas and Ray Stevens talked him into using me at the Showboat Hotel. They gave me a date [May 31, 1986] and sent me a plane ticket.

In those days, you could take the ticket to the airport and get a refund, so that’s what I did. I cashed in the ticket and called the husband of the woman who sold us our meat. He was a mark, and as crazy as a loon, but he loved me and he loved bikers. He enjoyed whiskey and two-dollar cigars, owned a fancy Cadillac, and played the role of a big shot. I didn’t tell anyone I cashed in the tickets, so after I got the money, I asked him, "Hey, man. Do you wanna go to Vegas?"

He jumped on it. "Oh, yeah!"

I said, "Okay, I’ll make you a deal. You drive me to Vegas. I’ll pay for everything, but you have to bring a bunch of those cigars."

He showed up with a fistful of cigars and two big bottles of expensive brandy. We drove all the way to Vegas from Amarillo in that air-conditioned Cadillac, drinking brandy and smoking cigars.

When I walked into the dressing room, I looked at one of the programs and saw everybody’s name on the card except mine. When Ray walked in, I said, "Hey, I don’t see my name on the lineup."

He said, "You dumb shit. They don’t gotta know your name. You’re here to do jobs. Who gives a fuck? You’re makin’ money."

In my first match, I teamed up with El Siberiano to wrestle Shawn Michaels [Michael Hickenbottom] and Marty Jannetty [Fredrick Marty Jannetty]. I went out, did the match, went back to the locker room, and got dressed. While I was tying my shoes, I heard Gagne out in the hallway with Ray. "You tell that son-of-a-bitch to get dressed again. I didn’t pay to fly him down here for just one fuckin’ match. I want his ass back out there! We’re doin’ television here. Do you hear me?"

Ray walked in and said, "Hey, man. You’ve gotta go back out."

I didn’t mind wrestling a second time. If Verne had let me, I would have wrestled in every match on the card. I missed being in the ring and it felt so good to take bumps again. I went out and wrestled Brad Rheingans. I must not have done too badly because Verne brought me back to Vegas two

months later to wrestle Curt Hennig. Both times, he paid me well and my room and food was taken care of.

I went back one more time and wrestled Jimmy (Superfly) Snuka. Talk about two peas in a pod. I was getting high in my hotel room at the same time he was getting high in his. When we got into the ring and looked into each other's eyes, there was nobody home in either one. We were both so stoned, but what a fantastic match we had. That was the last time I wrestled on national television.

It never crossed my mind that my career was winding down. The only reason I quit wrestling was because I had trouble finding places to get booked. When the business went to hell, my whole life went to hell. I didn't know what to do. I wasn't depressed. I was just discouraged and disgusted with the turn the business had taken. If the territories had remained in place, though, I would have been involved in some capacity even today. I still want to get into that ring whenever I attend an independent show. Wrestling is the only thing I've ever done that I really cared about. I'm so thankful for friends who promoted independent shows and booked me, even when I was 70 years old. When my legs went, though, that was it.

I managed a few guys on some of the small independent shows. One of them was Eddie Pittman, who had been wrestling as Chief Iron Claw.

Eddie Pittman and I knew a promoter who was willing to use us on his cards. So we decided to come up with a new character based on the Leatherface character from the Texas Chainsaw Massacre [1974] movie.

We went to an old cemetery in Pensacola to have some pictures made. It was a scary place. Eddie put on rubber boots and a butcher's apron, poured beef blood all over himself, and put on a rubber mask of an old man. He held a chainsaw and looked really scary standing in that graveyard. I dressed up like a butcher and got the biggest meat cleaver I could find. We were taking pictures when a school bus pulled up at the corner of the street less than 20 yards from where we stood. The kids got off the bus and, when it pulled away, they looked straight at us. They started to scream and ran in every direction. I was waving my hands, with the meat cleaver in one of them, and Eddie was waving the chain saw. We were trying to make them

understand we were just taking pictures. We got the hell out of there because we thought somebody might call the cops and report us.

We sent pictures to the promoter and he booked us on his next show. They drew fairly well, but it was a typical independent promotion. The towns didn't draw, we didn't make any money, and the promotion closed down shortly after it opened.

For some reason, I just didn't like the Leatherface gimmick, so I decided to come up with a new character for Eddie. I loved the movie Halloween [1978] and I thought Michael Myers would be a great character for Eddie. We bought a long, white coat, a machete, and a Michael Myers mask. Eddie bought a cheap, plastic mask that he thought looked really good, but it looked so cheap.

We walked out and Eddie got into the ring. After walking around the ring so the fans could see his gimmick, he took off the coat and handed it and the machete to me. I took everything back to the dressing room and walked back out. As I was walking up the aisle towards the ring, the bell rang and Eddie ran towards his opponent. The guy caught him off guard and dropped him with a big bump … and the mask flew off! I couldn't believe it. His first match with the new gimmick and the mask came off in the middle of the ring. Eddie was trying to hide his face and the people were yelling, "Chief Iron Claw! Chief Iron Claw!" I threw a towel into the ring and he covered up his head and face.

Looking back on it now, it was hilarious, but at the time, I was devastated. It seemed like my world was falling apart. The wrestling territories were gone and everything I tried just went to hell.

I like to watch old wrestling. I hear young people today talk about how boring wrestling was in the old days. They say we laid around applying holds to each other. Well, we got more serious heat "laying around" in those holds than the guys get today with all the bouncing around they do. We were convincers. We got more true heat with those holds than the guys do today with all the high-flying stuff they do.

One of the biggest problems I faced when I left the wrestling business was learning to live and survive in the real world. I used to drink to forget how much I missed the business. I'd go to the gym, or I'd go to the bars. I still do both of those things, but I don't drink anymore. Everybody knows me in those places, so I just sit around and tell stories. Now and then, Margie will tell me to get lost for awhile and I'll go out for about four hours.

I miss the excitement, the thrill of entertaining the wrestling fans, the glory, and the glamour. I miss the money, too, but that comes last on the list. I was too much of a glory hound. I didn't care that much about the money.

What do I miss the least? That's easy. The promoters' bullshit.

"We're gonna do wonders for you, boy!"

"You're gonna make more money than you ever made before."

"You won't ever want to leave this territory."

"We'll have you farting through silk."

No, that's the one thing I don't miss at all. Promises, promises.

Chapter 25
Split Personality

During the process of writing this book, Scott Teal asked me if I could pinpoint the most memorable moment of my career. I couldn't answer him because I was always, always happy. Wrestling never became a job to me. Every moment I spent in that ring was a pleasure. I enjoyed it so much.

A lot of people don't understand how unusual the wrestling business was. Most wrestlers were very bizarre people. Most of us had outlandish characters and personalities that were nothing like anything you'd find in the real world. The closest thing you could find to a wrestler would be movie stars, but they were only characters when they were acting in the movies or TV shows. When they left the production studio, or the location where they were filming, they went back to being the average Joe Blow.

Many wrestlers were characters all the time, both in and out of the ring, but most of them went to the arenas, did what they were expected to do, and went back to their normal lives. That wasn't me. When I created a new gimmick or character, I changed into the clothes that reflected my character … and until I changed my character, those were the type of clothes I wore 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If I was a cowboy, I was a cowboy 24 hours a day, not just in the ring or at the arena. I talked, ate, slept, and acted like my character all the time, both inside and outside the arenas. Most of my partners did, as well. One of the things I really appreciated about people like Jim Dalton, Frank Dalton, Kenny Mack, and Chris Colt was they lived their characters all the time, just as I did.

With a couple of exceptions, my partners were like me. Jim Baugus was Jim Dalton … 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Kenny Mack was Frank Dillinger … 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Charles Harris was Chris Colt … 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We all had the attitude that, if we were going to be a character, we had to become that character and live it both inside and outside the arenas.

When Jim Baugus and I were the Daltons, we dressed like gunfighters and wore guns. When I was a Legionnaire with Rene Goulet, I believed I was a Legionnaire. Goulet was a great partner, but he only wore the outfit when he was in the ring. I wore it everywhere, inside the ring and out. I became the character I was portraying.

Kenny Mack and I made the people believe our gimmick by living our gimmick … inside the ring and out. People who really knew me, though, knew we weren't the kind of people we made ourselves out to be. We lived two lives. At home, we weren't any different from any other family man. We went to the store, took out the garbage, watched TV, and played with the kids. When we left the house, we became somebody else. I hate to use the word, but we were in show biz, and that being the case, we had to live our gimmick so people would believe in our characters and buy tickets to see us wrestle.

I had at least 13 different gimmicks: Don Kalt, Don Stevens, Don Juan the Magnificent, Wildman Don Stevens, Mr. America, Don Fargo, Jack Dalton, Jack Dillinger, The Hogg, The Mercenary, Private Don Fargo, Fonzo Fonzirelli, and Don Garfield.

I'm sure there were a few other wrestlers who may have come close to that number, but I don't think any of them lived the gimmick as I did. Wrestlers put on masks, created unusual personas, and portrayed interesting characters. They left their homes and went to the arenas, where they changed their clothes and put on their — for lack of a better word — costumes. They did their job, changed back into their civilian clothes, packed their bags, and went to the next town … where they repeated their performance. They'd go home to their families and life would carry on. Not me. When the matches were over, I headed for the roughest bar I could find and lived my gimmick.

There were times when promoters would suggest ideas for a character, but unless I really liked it (as in the case of Bruiser's suggestion for the Legionnaires), I wouldn't go for it. I had to feel the character. Again, that's what Buddy Rogers taught me: "You have to feel it. You have to believe it."

My family and friends knew me as Don Fargo, a wild and crazy guy who did all kinds of strange things. Whenever I came home to Pensacola, I would return as my new character. They would say, "Who are you supposed to be?"

I would say, "What do you mean? I'm [so-and-so]."

I changed my personality completely to fit the gimmick I was portraying and actually lived the part. I lived them so well that I made believers out of the people. In the backs of their minds, they knew I was Don Fargo, but they didn't think about me as being anyone other than my character because of the way I carried myself.

I laugh when I think about those days because, not only did I convince the people, but I convinced myself. In fact, it's a bit scary when I think about it. Even today, my wife will tease me and ask, "Who are you today, Fargo?"

Whenever she does that, I have to stop and think about what I had been doing: "I've been talking to Margie like I was doing an interview." I morph in and out of my characters in real life without even thinking about it.

People just don't understand the way we lived. We lived in a fairy-tale world. The wrestlers who had good common sense, like Lou Thesz, lived a normal life. Those of us who based our careers on characters, though, lived a different kind of life. To me, it was a necessity. My thought was, if I wanted to convince the wrestling fans that I was a certain character, I had to believe it myself. And that's exactly what I did.

Today, my personality changes from day to day. One day, I'll wake up in the morning and feel like I need to clean our house and yard. I'll cut the grass, rake leaves, pick up stuff scattered around the house, and scrub down the bathrooms. At other times, I don't care what the house looks like. I won't comb my hair or take a bath for days, as if I was reliving my days as the Chain Gang. On days like that, Margie will pick up on it and call me by whatever name I would have used in that setting. "Hey, Jack. Can you pick up some milk at the store?," or, "Fonzirelli! Don't forget to feed the dogs."

For the most part, when I was at home, I was Don Kalt, a kind, loving husband and father. As soon as I walked out the door, though, I would become another person. When I got home again, I would still be that person. My wife would have to remind me, "You're not in the ring, Fargo." It was like I had a split personality. When I was Don Fargo, I was Don Fargo … until I became Jack Dillinger. Then I'd be Jack Dillinger until someone called me on it and helped me snap back to reality.

There were times I slipped up because, for the most part, I really enjoy being around people. I would catch myself helping someone, or I'd stop to pet and play with a dog and people would see me. In those cases, it left people with the impression that, "Hey, he isn't as bad as I thought."

Bruiser used to get onto me about that. "Fargo! Quit actin' nice in public. You're supposed to be a mean, son-of-a-bitch."

Bruiser would jump on Ox Baker all the time for the same thing. Ox would talk to little kids and pat them on the head. Bruiser jumped his ass when he came back to the dressing room one night. "Ox! You're supposed to be a mean, giant son-of-a-bitch! You're actin' like a nice, lovable giant." Which, he was.

Joanne and Birdie both put up with my characters for years. They never were sure just who I would be when I woke up in the mornings, or when I got home from a trip. Eventually, they both decided they couldn't live with it and left me.

Today, people who used to go to the matches recognize me on the street. I still act like I did when I was wrestling. In my mind, I think I can still bench press 300 pounds. I think I can still do wheelies on a motorcycle. I don't accept the fact that I'm a normal person. I'm Wildman Don Stevens, Jack Dalton, and the Fonz.

People walk up to me and say, "Hey, Fargo! It's been a long time since we last talked." In most cases, I don't know who the hell they are, but I'll carry on a conversation with them until I can decide whether or not I know them. I might ask, "How is so-and-so?" Their answer, in turn, might lead me to remembering who they are or how I knew them.

Even though most wrestling fans remember me, one common mistake I often get is from people in Pensacola, especially the older people, who think I'm Mario Galento. They'll walk up and ask, "I remember seeing you wrestle. Is your name Mario Galento?"

I said, "No, Mario was the guy with black hair and earrings. He's dead."

They'll ask me things like, "Who was the guy who looked like a lumberjack?"

I'll tell them and they'll say, "Oh, yeah. That's it. Joe Leduc."

The ones who are pretty sure I was a wrestler, but don't remember my name, will ask me who I was. "I'm Don Fargo."

"Oh, yeah! I used to watch you."

My favorite people are the ones I see staring at me. They'll walk up and say, "Uh … I know you … uh … I used to watch you on TV … uh … oh, yeah! You're Don Fargo!" Yeah, I know you."

During that past 20 years, I've had the privilege of working with some really good kids, all of whom had a deep respect for the wrestling business and desire to be a part of it. Unfortunately, they all came along too late. The wrestling business as I knew it no longer exists, and every year, there are fewer and fewer places where they can show their old-school skills.

Even so, I'm proud of so many of the guys I trained. Two, in particular, stand out.

The first is Art Andrews, who wrestled as Ron Fargo. Ron was a good performer and one hell of a little wrestler. I worked with Ron for about a year. He was doing really well and his career was progressing nicely. Unfortunately, just like it happened to many of us at one time or another, the girl he was in love with dumped him. It hit him hard. It took the heart out of him. I tried to get him up and back in because he was good. I was getting him booked in Japan when that happened, but he just couldn't get over that girl. I knew what he was going through. I had been through it. It

hurt to see what he was going through because he was such an asset for the business.

One year, we went to Harley Race's seminar at the Cauliflower Alley Club reunion. Ron got into the ring to wrestle one of the other attendees, a guy who didn't have any clue about what he was doing. He threw Ron into the ropes and, as Ron rebounded and prepared to jump over him, the dumb son-of-a-bitch straightened up. Ron tried to jump high and clear him, but he hit the top of the guy's head and sprained his ankle when he fell to the mat. I think the first thing the new guys today need to learn is how to take care of their opponent.

I'm currently working with a kid named Michael Coleman, but everybody knows him as Crash. He wants so badly to experience the thrill of hearing the noise of the people and I want to give it to him.

I met Crash at a biker bar. I don't think he was 18 years old at the time. I thought he was acting shameful because he was carrying on and acting wild and crazy. He was doing all kinds of goofy stuff. I didn't consider it at the time, but now that I think about it, he was acting a lot like I do today … and I'm 86 years old (I think) and should know better.

We began to talk and he told me he was a boxer. We developed a friendship and, eventually, he asked me if I could get him into wrestling. I didn't have anywhere to train him, so I kept putting him off. When I found a ring and place to train, I agreed to work with him. I started him training with weights before I let him get into the ring. On the first day, I had him bench-pressing 135 pounds. He did it easily and said, "Add more weight!"

I said, "No, not yet." I was going to use the same training method that Jack Channing used with me in 1949. I had Crash do hundreds of reps with 135 pounds. I built him up until he could do 180 easily. He moved up to 225, and then 240. He got more and more excited as he got stronger. He did 280. One day, he said, "I know I can do 300."

I told him, "Well, we'll try it, but it's your ass because if you get stuck, you're fucked. I don't think I can pick that up anymore."

"Ahh, I'll do it."

He picked that bar up off the uprights and held it. I told him, "Don't hesitate. Bring it down and push it back up."

He just held it there. He kept grunting and telling himself, "I can do it. I can do it."

"What are you? The fucking little train that could? Do it!"

He grimaced, dropped the bar to his chest, and pushed it right back up. He came up off that bench screaming and hollering. The people in the gym were looking over at us. "I did it! I did it! I did it!"

Now he wants to do 310.

After that, I agreed to begin training him to wrestle. Crash had been a boxer, so I didn't have to show him a whole lot about footwork, but I had to slow him down and teach him to make whatever he did count for something. I taught him the old-fashioned way of wrestling … how to get holds, how to take people down, and even how to hurt people.

I took him to one of Tom Prichard's wrestling seminars. He wrestled the guys there like we used to … and he was hurting them. Those guys were a bunch of crybabies. When he dropped them with a hip toss, he brought them over and dropped down on them like we used to, not going down on one knee and one-hand. When he took someone down, he took them down.

Somewhere along the line, I came up with the idea of promoting boxing versus wrestling. Some of the promoters liked the idea and the fans really got into it, but Crash kept saying he didn't want to do that. He wanted to wrestle … the old-school way. Now wrestling is his whole life. He just loves it. I also have him working with weights in the gym. You wouldn't know it to look at him, but for a guy his size, he's super strong. He can bench press 300 pounds like it's nothing.

Crash is an athlete and he's perfect for the ring. Unfortunately, he was born too late for the times. He would have been a natural for old-school

wrestling.

I never think about being old. I don’t get around as well as I used to, but in my mind, I still feel like a 20-year-old. It’s like the time I ran into Billy Darnell at the Gulf Coast Wrestlers’ Reunion in Mobile. I hadn’t seen him since my rookie days in Columbus, Ohio. I looked at him and knew I had seen him someplace before. I said, "Excuse me. I can’t read your name tag. Who are you? I know you from someplace, but I can’t put a finger on it."

"Billy Darnell."

When he said that, I said something really stupid. "What the hell happened to you?"

He laughed and said, "I turned old."

I used to stay in touch with a lot of people, but they’re all leaving me. My brother Jackie, Ray Stevens, Joe Turner … and so many more.

I love talking to Billy Wicks, but we don’t talk as much as we used to. In April 1959, I was booked with him in Memphis. He was tough. The second we locked up, I thought, "Oh, shit! It’s gonna be a long night." I could tell Wicks was going to be working stiff and I didn’t want any part of that. I tried to stay with him for a bit, but I had been drinking beer and eating spaghetti earlier that night and I began to feel a little nauseated. I jumped out onto the arena floor and crawled underneath the ring, like I did when I played the part of a coward to get the fans mad at me. Before I could get all the way under the ring, Wicks followed and dragged me out by the ankles. I was trying to tell him, "Lemme go! I gotta puke! I gotta puke!"

I thought he was going to kill me, but he didn’t. We got back into the ring and did what we were supposed to do, but I couldn’t wait to finish the match and get back to the dressing room. When I did go back, the guys were all laughing, which made me realize it had all been a setup. Before I went out to wrestle Billy, I had told Buddy Fuller that I had eaten a big plate of spaghetti shortly before I got there. Not one to let an opportunity to fuck with me pass him by, Fuller told Wicks to ride me like a train. I probably

had it coming because I used to mess with the guys all the time, just as Fuller and the rest of the Welch clan messed with me.

Wicks, Dick Steinborn and I were at the reunion in Mobile in 1999. As a rib, I took a cigarette, broke off the ends, and twisted the ends so it looked like a joint. Wicks was a retired sheriff's deputy, so as a joke, he held it and we took a picture together. I drew a cartoon of Wicks and me hugging each other, with joints in our hands.

As I get older and more of my friends pass away, it makes me realize how important the reunions are. I've been to the Cauliflower Alley Club several times, but the only two reunions I attend now are the Gulf Coast Wrestlers Reunion in Mobile and Scott Teal's Tennessee Wrestling Legends Reunion.

I love going to the Tennessee Wrestling Legends Reunion because it's the closest thing to a family reunion of any reunion I've been to. We sit around in a home-style environment and talk about old times. I enjoy seeing Duke Myers there each year. I could talk to him all day long. I enjoy his company. We sit together, tell stories about old times, and laugh. I'm so thankful for Garry Johnson, who takes me to Nashville every year so I can be a part of it.

And then there's Jackie Fargo, my brother.

When I teamed with Jackie, he was always so cool about things. He used to say, "Hey, Don. Listen. You look so good, I think you should start the match."

I started the match, all right. I'd wrestle … and wrestle … and wrestle. When I had gotten all the sympathy out of the audience I could, he'd lean over the ropes and say, "Tag me, tag me." I'd tag him and he'd jump in and clean house, taking all the glory with his big comeback. I'd be laying there all beaten up; unable to move. A few minutes later, when the match was over, he'd put me over. "You did a great job, Don."

When we were at the Hall of Heroes dinner at the 2009 Mid-Atlantic Wrestling Legends Fanfest, they called Jackie and me up for our induction into the Hall of Heroes. Of course, I couldn't get around as fast as I used to,

but Jackie was up there before they finished saying his name. He took the microphone and got everyone’s attention, just like he always did. It must have taken me five minutes to get on stage. As soon as I did, Jackie handed me the mic and walked off. Just like he did in the ring, he took all the glory and then tagged me in, leaving me with nothing to do or say. I had to laugh because he hadn’t changed one bit in all those years. As I stood there and thought about what I could say that would be different from what Jackie said, the first thing that came to mind was how important the guys were to me. "I just want to say, at one time, I was a big star and I got over really big … but I couldn’t have done it without you guys out there."

Jackie made much better business decisions than I did. He really was tied to Nashville. He had a lot of connections there, so he had a lot of pull, and the people in the wrestling office liked him. He saved his money and he had no reason to move. I was the opposite. I was a loner, I spent my money as fast as I made it, and I wanted to go to a lot of different places and have fun. We split up several times when I got the urge to go somewhere else, but we always got along.

I loved Jackie and I appreciate all he did for me, but there was a side to Jackie I didn’t like. Jackie was for Jackie, and nobody else. Len Rossi used to tell me, "Donnie, you’re the better performer of the two. Jackie gets more attention because all he does is joke around, in the ring and out. He’s fucking you around on your money, too."

I don’t know if that’s the case because I was happy with the money I made when Jackie and I were together. Len did, however, have an inside track as to how the payoffs were made because he worked for a time in the office. If Jackie wasn’t entirely on the level with me, that’s something he’ll have to answer for, but I never thought he was holding out on me.

I tried to get Jackie to come to Scott Teal’s reunion, but he was of the mindset that if he was going to go to an event, he should be paid. In fact, that’s what he told me. "I’m not gonna spend my money to go to the reunion unless Scott pays me. I was in the wrestling business to make money. That’s the bottom line. I liked being around the boys, but it was just business to me, and not friendship."

I hated to hear that because the boys would have enjoyed seeing Jackie again, and Scott's reunion isn't a fan convention. In fact, the only people who can get in are the people who actually worked for Nick Gulas. Why would Scott pay Jackie to come to something like that? Now that Jackie's gone, it's too late, and his passing taught me a valuable lesson. Life is too short to have an attitude like that, and I want to spend every second of my life with my friends and family until the day I die.

In May 2014, just weeks before we wrapped up the final pages of this book, I received one of the greatest honors of my life. I was inducted into the Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame and Museum in Amsterdam, New York.

Tony Vellano, the president of the organization, is the driving force behind the Hall of Fame. Everything he does is first class. He treats the wrestlers like royalty and makes them feel like they are the most important people in the world.

When we got off our plane, we were picked up at the airport and taken to our hotel in Johnstown. When I walked in, I saw a group of people sitting in the lobby. I didn't recognize them at first because it's been a long time since I saw most of them, but the first person to greet me was my old friend Dominic DeNucci. During the next few hours, I was reunited with old friends like Stan Hansen, Davey O'Hannon, Johnny Mantell, Butcher Vachon and Greg Valentine.

After we checked in, we all went to the Hall of Fame building in Amsterdam. I couldn't walk up the stairs to go to the upper floor, so they put me on the freight elevator. I don't think I've ever been on an elevator that took what seemed to be five minutes to go from the first floor to the second floor. It was pitch black in there, too.

I saw the space where they had my shoes, boots, pictures, and memorabilia. My display was in good company because J.J. Dillon's display was next to mine and Buddy Rogers' was next to his. As I walked through the museum looking at the other displays, my mind kept flashing back to the days when I was wrestling a lot of those guys.

Tony Vellano was the perfect host, and he was very conscious about keeping things running smoothly and on time. I arrived a little late for the autograph signing, but I made it. I had a lot of fun signing autographs for the fans. I was sitting next to Davey O'Hannon. At one point, a little kid walked up and stood in front of his table. I could tell the kid was scared. He looked at Davey and said in a small, meek voice, "Who are you?"

Davey jumped up out of his chair, walked around the table, and grabbed the kid by the shirt. "What do you mean, who am I?"

He then smiled and assured the kid that he was just kidding. A few seconds later, the kid said, "Oh, you're one of the old boys. You must have wrestled in the '40s and '50s."

Davey jumped up and grabbed him again. It was so funny.

When the kid came over and asked me if I would sign his picture, I said, "Come around here." He came around to my side of the table and we had a picture made of me hugging him.

It really was cool to meet people who had seen me wrestle years before. The fans would come up to me and say things like, "Boy, I like the way you guys used to wrestle. There's nothing like it today." That made me feel proud, but in another way, it made me sad that the wrestling business has changed so much.

I made two new friends during the weekend … Roy and Lisa Haynes. What good people they are. Like me, they're dog lovers. They had their two huge Great Pyrenees dogs with them. Roy, known as "the cheapest man in America," and Lisa, a former lady wrestler known as Lisa "The Adjuster," take in stray dogs and run a pet rescue organization called Save Our Strays. Shortly after I got home, I received a package containing some great gift items for my dogs. People like Roy and Lisa don't come along every day. If for no other reason, I'm glad I was at the Hall of Fame just for the opportunity to meet them.

The banquet and induction ceremony on Saturday night was just fabulous (pun intended). During the speeches, one of the guys at the banquet said,

"We were the guys who paved the way for the guys who wrestle today and ruined our business. The people there, wrestlers and fans alike, were all old-school because they applauded.

When it was my turn to get inducted, Hammer called me up on stage and proceeded to tell the story about me hanging from the roof of the King Edward Hotel and crashing Vince McMahon’s party. I kicked him when I realized what he was doing because I didn’t want him to tell that story, but he did it, anyway. In my short speech, I once again stressed how much I appreciated all the guys who put me over because, without them, I wouldn’t have had the career I did. When I finished, they presented me with a plaque and a beautiful ring.

Afterwards, I went up to Tony Vellano and said, "Tony, I want to thank you ..."

He said, "Hold it. You don’t thank me. I thank you for being here. You’re the honored guest."

He looked at my hand and said, "Where’s your ring?" When they gave me my award and ring, I didn’t even open it. I just went back to my seat. He said, "Get the ring out and put it on."

I did what he asked, and since then, I haven’t taken it off. I’m so proud to be a part of the Professional Wrestling Hall of Fame because that particular organization is, indeed, the true Hall of Fame for professional wrestling.

When I got home on Sunday night, my cell phone rang. It was Tony Vellano. He told me he was just calling to be sure I got home safely. That’s class. Thanks, Tony, for all you do for the boys.

Chapter 26
Make Room for Daddy

I don’t have many regrets, but if I were to name just one, it would be not spending enough time with my family. As I got older, I began to see the dumb mistakes I made in life, but when I was young, I didn’t care about anything. I was on top of the world.

When I first got into wrestling, we wrestled six nights a week and one afternoon TV show. Eventually, promoters began booking shows on Sunday, so we worked seven nights a week. We were gone all the time. In territories like Mobile and Pensacola, we were home every night because the trips were short. However, in places like Oklahoma and Amarillo, we would be gone for a week at a time.

When we weren’t wrestling, we were out partying. Women walked in and out of our motel rooms all the time. It didn’t matter if you were handsome or ugly, fat, muscular or thin, a big star or a curtain-jerker … if you were a wrestler, the ladies threw themselves at you. They would do anything we asked, even if we asked them to have sex with someone else.

Of course, offers of sex weren’t something we turned down often, but it played havoc in the personal lives of many of the wrestlers. When I first met Buddy Rogers, he asked me, "Are you married?"

"Yeah."

He said, "Then you shouldn’t be in this business."

I didn’t really know what he meant at the time, but I soon found out. The temptations were too many to resist. I was happily married and I really loved my wife, but I was easily swayed by the skirts. When I was away from home so much, I had to have companionship, and there usually was a woman willing to give it to me. I felt guilty whenever I was home with my

family, but I was lonely when I was away. The sad thing was, it was always temporary. The girls usually went to another wrestler and new conquests. When I met Margie, though, she changed my whole life and outlook.

When I was teaming with Ray Stevens, we had women in our room every night … and often more than just two. Jackie and I had a lot of fun together, but when it came to women, we stayed in our own rooms. Jackie wasn't quite as wild as I was.

My problem was that even when I was home, I wasn't at home. I would be out at the bars, mixing it up with the lower classes of people. Most of the promoters didn't like us hanging around with the public because they thought it made them too familiar with us, but guys like Dick the Bruiser, Buddy Fuller, and Lee Fields thought it was a great idea.

Those things are what contributed to the failure of my first two marriages. It hurt a lot of boys. We got so used to being away from our wives and family that we forgot about them when we were away. When we finally go home, it hit us, "What in the hell was I thinking?" That was especially true when we had kids. When we got home, it dawned on us just how little time I had spent with them.

I'm so thankful for my kids. I wasn't around most of the time, and whenever I went to a new territory, I uprooted them and took them with me. Even then, we were on the road all the time, so I wasn't able to attend their school activities, their graduations, or any other events. And yet, when it was time to move, I simply said, "We're leaving. Pack up your shit and get ready to go."

They never complained. They never said, "Come on, Dad! We don't wanna leave our friends!" I'm sure they weren't happy, but they knew, due to the nature of the wrestling business, I couldn't stay in one place too long.

I hardly ever took my kids with me to the arenas. They didn't want to go, and my wife didn't, either. Joanne did when I first got into the business because it was something new, but after we had children, she stayed home with them.

I remember the neighborhood boys playing baseball in our backyard one day. I went outside and said, "Come on, boys. You're going with me tonight." Ronnie got so mad. Oh, what a temper he had. He threw down the bat and stormed over to where I stood, as if he was going to fight me. I grabbed him by the arm and said, "Hey, I don't wanna see that again. You don't act like that." He gave me the meanest look. If looks could kill, I would have had a massive heart attack right there. "And don't look at me like that. You may think you're tough stuff, but I'll kick your ass any time of the day, even when I'm 90 years old. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir."

I have to admit, by the time I was 50 years old, he was a pretty stout young man. I don't think I would have followed through with my threat. He might have kicked my ass.

I know people used to think I was tough on my kids because of the way I looked. The truth is, I never whipped my children. Never! If they did something wrong, I would sit down and talk to them. One time, Ronnie came home from school early. I knew there was something wrong because they never let the kids go home early. When I asked him why he was home, he said, "The shop teacher whooped me with a board."

"What!?"

I didn't care what my boy did. Nobody touches my boys. The school wasn't too far away, so I got my ball bat and walked over. The high school team was practicing on the football field as I walked across it. They all stopped what they were doing and watched me. I walked into the school office, went right past the secretary, and marched into the principal's office. I said, "Where is so-and-so?"

He said, "What do you want with him?"

I said, "I wanna talk to that son-of-a-bitch."

He said, "Hey, hey! Watch your language."

I said, "Well, I wanna talk to him."

He looked at the bat and said, "With that?"

I said, "I was playin’ ball with my boy and forgot I was holdin’ it."

He said, "Well, he went home."

I said, "I’m gonna tell you somethin’. He beat my boy on the butt with a board. I don’t go for that."

He said, "Well, when the kids get out of hand here, we take measures to teach them a lesson."

I said, "No, you won’t. Not with my kid. I don’t whip my kids. You ain’t gonna either. I better not hear about it happenin’ again … and I mean it, brother."

Ronnie didn’t want to go back to school the next morning, but he did, and nobody bothered him after that.

I used to bring presents home when I came home from a trip. One time, I bought him a dirt bike and trailer. I wanted to surprise him, so I pulled up outside the school just as everyone was leaving. He walked out with his friends and they all broke out into a run. He was so happy. "Oh, wow!" We went to the store and I bought him a complete, leather dirt bike outfit. He wanted to do indoor bike racing so badly. He practiced, and he practiced, and he practiced. On the day of his first race, they got all the boys lined up on the starting line. They waved the checkered flag for them to go … and my boy’s bike went down on the first turn.

That was the end of that. He lost confidence in himself and, to my knowledge, never got on a bike again.

I took his bike and made a chopper out of it. I made it look like a Harley with all the decals and Harley shit.

Donnie is my oldest son. He has had a lot of education. He went to Purdue to become a veterinarian. He took me to his classroom lab one time and

showed me where and how they study animals. He married his high-school sweetheart and they're still together. I love them both. They live in Indianapolis, where he has a veterinarian practice, and they are a sweet family. They come to Pensacola every so often and we all go out to eat. They always invite me to go to Panama City with them, but I don't go to Panama City to visit anybody. I got into a lot of trouble there once and it brings back too many bad memories. My kids understand and drive down here to visit me.

Ronnie is the youngest, and he was the wildest, of my children, but he calmed down when he got older. Joanne would get so upset with him, but I would tell her, "Just leave him alone. He's going through things I went through. I know what it's like. The more you try to pound something into his head, the longer it'll take for him to snap out of it." He finally settled down. He became an architect and drew plans for buildings, and later opened his own company in Midland, Texas. He performs echocardiograms on patients before the heart doctor gets them. He works two hospitals in that area and is on call all the time.

My daughter, Linda, took after her mother. Not only is she beautiful, but she's a genuinely nice person, not to mention a great mother to her three children. She works with her brother, Donnie. One of her kids, James, is a tattoo artist. The last time I saw him, he looked like he was still living in the '60s, which I thought was cool. She named her youngest son Donnie, which turned out to be the perfect name for him since he's always coming home with the cops. Her daughter, Sarah, is just great. She's married and has two children.

Most amazing of all, I have two great grandchildren.

I'm proud of my kids for what they've done with their lives, but mostly because they didn't turn out to be like me.

They fly me in now and then. The last time they did, I was going home for Thanksgiving and my granddaughter's wedding. I had two broken hips and made a transfer in Dallas. The airport personnel were kind enough to push me around the airport in a wheelchair, but they were so stupid. They left me at the wrong gate and I missed my flight. I didn't know what to do. I can't

read, so I didn’t know where I was supposed to go. The service people had left, so I had to wheel myself all the way back to the ticket counter. The lady there got me on another flight and said, "You need to get to gate twenty-nine right away because the plane is scheduled to leave in twenty minutes."

I had a long way to go, so I was pushing the wheels on that wheelchair as fast as I could. When I reached gate 11, a young man walking in the same direction saw me struggling and pushed me the rest of the way … only to find out the gate had already been closed. That really made me mad. I wheeled myself up to the counter to talk with the counter agent. I get crazy when I get angry and I don’t know how to talk to people. "Hey, I’ve gotta get on that fuckin’ plane."

She said, "Watch your language. Watch your language."

I babbled on and on. "Well, I’m going home for Thanksgiving and my granddaughter’s wedding and I missed my plane because they pushed me to the wrong gate and I come to this gate and the plane don’t wait on me and they was supposed to call to tell you I was coming." I went on and on without taking a breath. I finally called Donnie and told him what had happened. He said, "Let me talk to the lady."

She talked to him, handed the phone back to me, and he said, "Everything’s gonna be alright. The lady will tell you what to do and we’ll get you up here tomorrow"

After I finished talking to him, the lady said, "We’re going to put you up in a hotel for the night and we’ll bring you back in the morning. We’ll set you up with a free Thanksgiving dinner and whatever else you need."

I have to say, they really treated me well. There was another woman on the bus who had also missed her flight and we were both taken to the hotel. The people there took us to the dining room and let us order anything from the menu we wanted.

The strangest thing happened while we were eating. A man walked over and said, "Excuse me, but are you Don Fargo?"

"Yeah."

He said, "My god. I used to watch you … but you wrestled under a different name."

"Yeah, Jack Dalton."

"Yes. The gunslinger."

"Yeah."

He called the waiter over and said, "Bring Mr. Fargo and his friend a beer."

Several other people overheard our conversation and came over to introduce themselves.

While I sat there, the woman who had been with me on the bus motioned for me to come over to her table. I took my beer over and sat down. "You look lonely over there," she said. "I'd love to have you sit here with me."

I wasn't lonely. I was just alone. My first thought was that she wanted to sleep with me, but she was really nice and we talked for quite awhile about our families and children. When it was time to leave, she pushed me to the elevator and I went up to my room. The next morning, I flew out and arrived in plenty of time for the wedding.

And then there are our other kids.

Margie and I began collecting dogs when we opened the City Limits bar. It was unbelievable how many stray dogs found their way to our place down that long stretch of highway. Since then, every time I've seen a stray dog walking down the road, I've taken them home with me. The most we had at any one time was 33. We've had Rottweilers, German Shepherds, Pit Bull Terriers, Pomeranians, and a huge assortment of mutts. We gave them all funny names: Panhead, Tasmania, Booger Boo, Little Man, Short Shit, and Boom Dogger were just a few of the dogs we had.

When we had 33 dogs, we had to be careful about keeping them segregated. They didn't all get along, so we had to separate them into groups. We had

dogs in every room of the house and others in pens outside. You should try to break up a fight between three Rottweilers. My oldest son, Donnie, is a veterinarian. He told me I shouldn't hit them when I'm trying to break them up because, if I do, the one I hit thinks one of the other dogs hit him, and that makes him angrier. Some people think you should throw water on them, but that makes them mad, as well. Donnie told me to get a can of pepper spray.

So what did I do? I bought a can of pepper spray. The next time they got into a fight, I grabbed the can, held it out, pushed down the nozzle … and sprayed myself in the eyes. I had it turned backwards. That stuff is really bad. I couldn't see anything. I was on my hands and knees, choking and trying to catch my breath. Meanwhile, the dogs had stopped fighting and were sitting there watching me.

Today, Margie and I have seven dogs, two Pomeranians and five mutts — Lady Laylay, Sassafras, Baby Blue Eyes, Pitter Pitter, Daisy, Tigger, and Tiger — and we love every one of them. I'm constantly telling my friends stories about them.

We let one group of dogs out at a time. For the most part, we let the little dogs stay out in the sun all day. They'll lay on the tables in our yard. We don't let our dogs out of our sight because we have a lot of snakes here. Margie checks to be sure there aren't any around before she lets them out. We put out snake repellent, but as soon as it rains, it washes away. Margie has to kill the snakes. I can't do it. People don't believe this, but I can't even kill a cockroach. I'll pick it up and put it outside. I don't like picking weeds, either.

Margie loves dogs as much as I do. When I go to the gym in the morning, she sits outside with a group of our dogs and reads books to them — out loud — for one hour. Out loud! And she times it with a kitchen timer! She sets up a table and chairs. The Pomeranians and smaller dogs lay on top of the table, while the other dogs sit in the chairs. At the end of the hour, she'll take them inside and bring out another group … and repeat her performance.

When I get home and pull onto our property, I get out of my car and walk to the front gate. Before I get inside, I can hear her say, "Oh, look, kids! Daddy’s home!" It’s hilarious. They all run to the gate, barking every step of the way.

The other day, I was talking to Margie on the phone. She said, "Fargo, you’ve gotta say somethin’ to Sassy."

"What?"

"Sassy."

"Sassy? Oh, yeah. Sassafras?"

"Yeah. You’ve gotta say something to that baby. She’s sittin’ at the front door, just whinin’ and cryin’."

"Where are you?"

"I’m standing right here next to her."

I said, "Put the phone down next to her ear."

Margie put the phone down next to her ear and I said, "Saaa-ssy! Saaa-ssy!"

Margie said, "She’s all right now."

I’m talking to a dog! I catch myself doing things like that all the time. If my wife’s cooking dinner or something, and I’m in the den all by myself, watching TV, I’ll look at them and say, "You guys better shut up. You better not interrupt my movie." A few minutes later, one of the dogs will begin to bark. "Shut up now, Freckles. Dang you, Freckles. You made me miss what they said!"

I think I do that because there’s nobody else in the room to talk to, and they cock their heads to the side, like they’re trying to figure out what I’m saying.

Margie doesn’t understand me at times. I’ll say, "I’ve gotta go to the store. What do you want me to get for the whatchamacallits?"

I didn’t want to say the word "dog" because they know that word and bark like hell whenever we say it. Margie will say, "You’ve gotta get ‘em somethin’ to eat. You’ve gotta get …" And she’ll get a piece of paper and write it out, "T-R-E-A-T-S."

I’ll look at it. She’s written it a hundred times, but since I can’t read, I just don’t recognize it. I’ll say, "What’s this?"

She’ll forget and say, "It’s treats."

All our dogs go nuts. "Arr, arr, arr, arr, arr!"

They know the word when it’s spoken. In fact, they can all be lying around, looking like they’re asleep, but if we say that word, they wake up and start to bark.

Our house today is like an old-folk’s home. Margie and I both have to take arthritis pills. Our dogs do, too, because they have a hard time walking. When everyone’s up and walking around, our house looks like it’s filled with Charlie Chaplins.

Other than one man who lives next door to us, we didn’t have neighbors when we first moved to the property where we live now. His company built a factory right next to our property. In a way it was good because they put up a big fence. One day, he asked me, "Are you interested in selling your property. Our plant might be able to use it in the future."

I said, "Sure, but the house is falling apart."

He said, "Well, I’m not interested in the house. I want the land."

I said, "Well, I have to do one thing. I’ll sell it, but you have to let me live here until I can find a place to go."

"Sure. There’s no rush."

"I’ve gotta have my money up front."

"We can do that."

I went home and told my wife what he said. She said, "That’s fine, but what about all our babies that are buried in the back yard?"

I said, "Oh, yeah. Let me think about that."

We have a pet cemetery in our back yard for all our pets that have died. I went next door and told the guy, "I talked to my wife and she said it would be fine to sell you the property, but I have to do one thing."

He said, "What’s that?"

I didn’t think about what I saying. I said, "You’ve gotta give me time. I’ve gotta dig up all these bodies that are buried in our back yard. When I figure out where I’m gonna to live, I’ll dig new graves and bury them there."

I said it exactly like that. Two hours later, he called and asked me to come over. He said, "Fargo, we think you’re asking too much for your property. We’ve decided we won’t be able to buy it."

I didn’t understand why he had changed his mind so quickly when he was so keen on the idea just hours before. I went home and told Margie what he said. When she asked me what I had said, I told her. She said, "You dumb ass! Why didn’t you tell him we had dogs buried here? You made it sound like we had human bodies buried in the yard."

I never thought of it that way. I was thinking of my dogs, which, when you get right down to it, were like children to me. I had to go back and try to explain. He said, "I understand, but I don’t think we have the money right now to handle what you’re asking."

That was my problem. I hope this book illustrates the importance of education. I say things like that because I don’t know any better.

It’s so sad when one of dogs dies. Margie and I both cry. None of them suffer. We give them pain medicine when they get old. When they die, they

go peacefully. They’re well taken care of and eat better than we do. I buy them steaks when I can and we have fun feeding them.

Margie has a room where she stays with her animals during the morning and early afternoon, while I stay in another one with mine. Around four o’clock in the afternoon, they quiet down and we lock them down in the rooms. Margie comes into the den with me around 4:30 in the afternoon and we watch TV together until 11:00 at night. We sit there like a couple of young kids, holding hands and watching movies. We have to be really quiet because we don’t want to wake the dogs. When they do wake up, all hell breaks loose. It takes just one dog to bark to kick off a cacophony of barking. We’re like, "Shut up! Shut the fuck up!"

When we go to bed, four of the dogs sleep in our bed. Lady Laylay can’t jump up on the bed, so she sleeps in a chair. Pitter Pitter and Daisy sleep on chairs in our dining room.

My son once told me, "All those dogs you have? They keep you going."

And they do. People bring us dogs all the time because they know we’ll love and take care of them.

That’s our life today … and I wouldn’t change it for anything.

The Main Event
CACK’S

I saved the story about Cack’s Saloon for the end because, in my opinion, nothing can surpass these stories. It’s not really what you would call an ending for the book because these events took place after I lost the City Limits bar. However, some of my favorite moments in life took place right there in Cack’s. They tore Cack’s down a long time ago, but it was a historic landmark. If I go into a biker bar today, the first thing you’ll hear people say is, "Hey, it’s Fargo! The oldest biker in town. He’s all that’s left of Cack’s."

When my wrestling career ended, I either ran or spent time in a lot of bars. The "bar of all bars," though, was Cack’s in Pensacola. I spent a lot of time at Cack’s after the City Limits bar and Knucklehad Saloon went out of business, and this is where my "pin-my-penis-to-the-table" stories resume.

When I look back at the days I spent at Cack’s, I refer to them as the "old-school biker days." The guy who ran it at the time was called Butterball. They used a room on one side of the building for storage. They had picnic and restaurant tables in there, so my friends and I would go in there and drink. The door to the room had a steel plate mounted in the center and we would shoot our guns at it. If you went in there, you could see the depressions where the bullets hit the metal.

Cack’s was a rough bar. Everybody packed guns or carried knives. Fights broke out every night and the women were wild. There were times we’d walk in and a couple would be having sex on the pool table.

Whenever I went to Cack’s, my custom was to get naked. I would go into the bathroom, take off all my clothes, and walk back out. I ran around the bar naked all the time. Nobody cared. Most of the people there were bikers and the bar was a place for them to go and do whatever they wanted. When somebody walked in, the first thing they were expected to do was flash

everyone. The women would show their tits and the guys would pull down their pants.

We had parties at Cack’s every night. It was downtown on the main street, which was a great location because people had to drive past it on their way home from work. Butterball had so much pull with the local political leaders that he would often block off the street to accommodate the huge number of regulars who came to the bar. There would be hundreds of bikes parked out front. He also had bleachers built so people could sit outside and drink. They would drink beer and throw beer bottles up onto the roof.

One time, Butterball asked me to paint the front façade of Kat’s. At three o’clock one afternoon, I put on my paint apron. Of course, other than that, I was naked. I put up a ladder and climbed it at three o’clock in the afternoon, the time when the most people would be driving by. I didn’t tell anyone I was going to do that. I just did it. When I reached the top rung of the ladder, I found the roof literally filled with beer bottles and cans. When I began to paint the mural on the highest section of the front wall, someone went inside and said, "Hey, everyone! Fargo’s up on the ladder painting the mural … and he’s naked!"

Butterball ran outside and said, "What the hell’s goin’ on?" When he looked up and saw my bare ass sticking out from underneath the apron, he shook the ladder and yelled, "Damn you, Fargo! Get the hell down from there and get some clothes on." As people drove past, they were blowing their horns at me.

I painted murals inside the building, too. One night, I painted a life-sized mural of a naked Conan the Barbarian in the women’s bathroom right above the toilet. He was swinging his sword with one hand and his two-foot-long Johnson with the other. I wouldn’t let anybody come into the bathroom while I was working and I didn’t finish until long after everybody had left. When I walked into the bar the next day, Butterball grabbed me and said, "Fargo! You’ve gotta come back and listen to these women."

I was all the way across the room from the bathroom when I heard someone scream, "Oh, my god! Look what Fargo did!"

Whenever a new girl came into the bar, she would eventually go back to the bathroom. Everybody would get dead silent so they could hear her reaction. Sure enough, we'd hear something like, "Oh, my god!"

Everybody who came into Cack's asked to see my performance of nailing my penis to a picnic table in the gun room. I can remember doing that and hearing someone in the main room tell someone who had just come in, "He's in the back. He has his dick nailed to the table."

"Oh, I gotta see this."

Before I knew it, the room would be filled with people.

I always loved dogs; especially pit bulls. I used to tie one end of a rope around one of my pit bulls, tie the other end to a double-lintel concrete block, and have them pull it across the floor. He pulled those blocks like they didn't weigh a thing. I increased the poundage by tying the rope to a Volkswagen engine. He couldn't actually pull it, but he could jump and jerk it across the floor. He loved the attention he got, not to mention the treats I gave him for doing his trick.

To appreciate the next part of this story, you have to remember that my twisted mind worked overtime to come up with something new and novel that would shock everyone and make them laugh.

One night, an idea hit me that made my "pin-my-penis-to-the-table" trick look like a child's game. The floor of the bar was linoleum, so a concrete block would slide across it rather smoothly. I put a safety pin through my penis and hooked a small-gauge steel chain to it. With a concrete block on the floor behind me, I would put the chain through my legs and have the other end attached to the block. I would bend over, plant my feet firmly on the ground, and begin to walk. Of course, that stretched my penis out underneath and behind me. It took me a lot of time (and mental fortitude) to get the block moving, but once it began to move, it would slide right along. I would drag it for several feet.

For months, I did that every time I went to the bar. For the first time in many years, nobody cared about seeing me nail my penis to the table. They

wanted to see me drag a concrete block. I did that so often that, eventually, regular customers would just ignore me. "Here comes Fargo again."

One afternoon, I decided to rekindle interest in my stunt by doing something I had never done before. The street outside Cack's front entrance was a heavily traveled street. A lot of traffic traveled down that street at three o'clock in the afternoon, most of it from a nearby Navy base, and there were 30 or 40 motorcycles lined up on the sidewalk, so the bar was always full of people. I didn't know the owner of the bar at that time, but on that particular day, he was going to have a meeting with someone very important. Not only that, but they had held a party for the bikers' kids a few days earlier, and they had an inflatable bounce house and a dunk tank set up. There were a few sailors and several other people in the back room when I walked in, and they all stopped talking when I began to undress.

This time, I took a piece of rope and tied it around my penis. When I cinched it up tight, I could see the guys in the room cringe. I tied the other end to the concrete block.

My goal? I was going to pull the block from the back door all the way out the front entrance, setting a world record that, more than likely, would never be broken. I got it going and walked right out between the tables. People would see me and tell anyone that was in the way, "Here comes Fargo! Move!"

The owner was talking to his "important" guest and his wife. I had my head down, so I didn't see them. I walked past them, determined to make it to the front door. All of a sudden, I jerked to a stop. I thought my Johnson was going to come out by the roots. The owner had put his foot on the rope and pinned it to the floor. "Fargo! Get out of here!"

I picked up the block and walked to the back room. I don't think I ever heard so many people laugh so hard at the same time. The people in that place were in hysterics. I may not have accomplished the task I had set out to do, but I had achieved my goal of bringing attention back to my gimmick. Apparently, his special guests didn't see the humor in my act and walked out.

I was pretty well known at Cack’s. Whenever anybody introduced me, they’d say, "This is the guy who drags the concrete around by his dick."

When I got to the back of the bar, I noticed the dunk tank. Still naked as a jaybird, I climbed up onto the seat and began to heckle the sailors. "Hey, swabees! See if you can hit me! I was a Marine! The Navy did our laundry! Blea-aaaaaah!"

They knew it was all in fun, so they got up and started throwing the balls at the target. They couldn’t hit it, so I ramped up the level of my insults. One guy actually got so pissed that he threw the balls on the ground, walked up to the tank, and hit the target with his fist. I went into the water. One of the sailors said, "We should have strapped that fucking block on him."

About three years ago, somebody opened a bar called Davy Jones’ Locker in Pensacola and contacted me about painting motorcycle murals on the front. Apparently, my reputation preceded me because, when we met, he said, "Listen, I know all about you. I’m trying to do this right, so please don’t act out."

I laughed and said, "What the hell! It’s a biker bar, isn’t it?"

He said, "I know, but I just don’t want you pulling that concrete block in here."

I told him he didn’t have any worries. "I promise. Not me, boy. I’m done with that stuff."

A month or so later, I went by there and everybody was sitting on the back patio. When I asked if the owner was there, they said he wasn’t. The girl who worked behind the bar asked, "What’re you gonna do, Fargo?"

I said, "I don’t know yet."

I grinned and went out to the parking lot. When I returned, I was carrying a cinder block I had found at a construction site near my home. When the girl saw it, she said, "Oh, god! You ain’t gonna do that, are you?"

I said, "Yeah."

She said, "Wait a minute! Just wait a minute," and ran into a side room. I thought she was going to call the owner and tell him what I was going to do. Instead, she came right back out with her camera. She wanted me to wait so she could be ready to take pictures!

It wasn’t a double lintel block like I had used before. It was a solid cinder block that was so heavy I could barely pick it up. It did, however, have a hole drilled into it, so it was perfect for what I had in mind.

Like the other bar, the floor was covered in linoleum, although the back patio was wood. I looked around the bar until I found an old electrical extension cord. I took off all my clothes, folded them up, and put them on the pool table. I tied that cord around my penis and, after cutting off the plug from the other end, pushed it through the hole in the block. I really tied that cord tightly.

Everybody other than the bar girl was outside in the back — talking, eating, laughing, and drinking — with no idea of what was going on inside. The girl was laughing and texting her best friend.

I got into position by the front door and, like a bull in the bullring, planted my feet firmly on the floor and began to push forward. That son-of-a-bitch was heavier than anything I had ever dragged before. Once I got it moving, though, it slid pretty well. When I reached the back door, I knew I had to pull the block over the threshold, which was a thin piece of aluminum that tapered towards the inside of the building. I put on an extra burst of power and that sucker bounced up and over it, landing on the wood flooring of the patio. I kept going and didn’t stop. When the people outside heard the door open, they all turned around. "Oh, shit!" They were falling over each other with laughter.

When I reached the far end of the patio, I raised my arms above my head — like Rocky Balboa did at the top of the steps leading to the Philadelphia Museum of Art — and shuffled my feet up and down.

When things settled down, I tried to untie the cord because it was digging into my skin and was really hurting, but I couldn’t loosen the knot. "Jeez! I can’t get it off!" I was beginning to panic because my penis was turning blue. The broads were laughing harder than ever by that time, which, normally, was the reaction I was looking for, but in that case, I had lost any sense of humor in the matter. In desperation, I looked around and asked, "Does anybody have a pocket knife?"

"You ain’t usin’ mine."

"No way you’re cutting there with my knife."

Nobody would lend me a knife. One of the girls ran into the bar and got a butcher knife from the kitchen. Without any hesitation, she walked out, grabbed my penis, and cut off the cord. I don’t know if you’ve ever been out in the cold weather and had your hands or feet frozen, but if you have, you know the pain you undergo when feeling comes back into your body parts. Well, just imagine what it would be like to unfreeze your dick, because that’s exactly what it felt like when the blood rushed back into it.

The girl who worked in the bar wasn’t the only one taking pictures. Everybody who had a cell phone with them had them out. I told them, "Don’t put those on the freakin’ Internet."

They said, "Oh, we won’t, man. We’re just texting it to our friends."

I said, "Where are they?"

One of the guys said, "Oh, I’m just texting it to my brother in California."

"California? How do you do that?"

I’m still new to that kind of stuff, but I didn’t know anything about it then. "You just sent a picture of me all the way to California?"

"Yeah."

All you guys do that?" I asked.

"Hell, yeah. Everybody sends photos now, Fargo."

I couldn’t believe it. I don’t have a picture of it, but I’m sure everybody else does, thanks to the Internet.

I was quite surprised by the reaction of the bar owner when he heard about it. He thought it was hilarious and invited me to give a repeat performance whenever I found the time. I did it several other times.

There were shelves in the bar where the owner displayed pictures of various people. My picture had been displayed there since the day the bar opened. After my third performance, two of the regulars in the bar picked up the concrete block and put it on one of the shelves. Later, they put the words "Don Fargo Trophy" on the block. Someone else owns that bar today, but the trophy was moved to a bar called II Wheelers Saloon, which is where it sits to this very day.

For awhile, because of the pictures being sent out, I was afraid I might be arrested for indecent exposure, but I never heard anything. It did make me think, though. I did so many things like that — driving naked on motorcycles, riding on car rooftops in the buff, mooning people — to which I never gave a second thought. I just didn’t think about the possible repercussions to some of my actions. I just wanted to have fun and to make other people laugh. Now that I’m older, I think back and can’t believe I did some of the things I did. I’m slowly beginning to realize how stupid I was.

Then again, just a few months before we finished this book, I pulled the block at II Wheelers Saloon … because my pervert editor wanted a picture of me in action for this book.

They say when you get older, you want to revisit your childhood, but how can I revisit something I never left? I’m 80-something years old, but I’m still just a big kid. When I walk through a store, I always visit the toy department to see what new things they have. While I’m there, I look for the toy soldiers and reminisce. Of course, they don’t make them out of lead like they used to. Like everything else, they’re made out of plastic.

As I get older, I look at things a lot differently than I used to. I realize how stupid I was to do some of the things I did, and I think about how crazy I was to do some of the dangerous things I did.

But, even in hindsight, I wouldn't change a whole lot about my life. Sure, there are things I wouldn't do if I could do them again, but I'd do most of it all over. I loved life and I tried to live it to its fullest … and I plan to do that until the day I die.

THE END